

**Negotiating the “Iron Cage”:
Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, and
Alasdair MacIntyre in Response to Max
Weber.**

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Declaration

I declare that:

- a.) this thesis has been written by me
- b.) this work is entirely my own
- c.) this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

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30th July 2004

Abstract

This study in political theory explores the challenges and potentialities of modern politics as envisaged within the work of Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, and Alasdair MacIntyre. It begins by confronting Max Weber's seminal diagnosis of the crisis era of late modernity. According to this diagnosis the world-historic process of rationalization is deeply paradoxical in promising freedom and yet threatening servitude under an "iron cage" of deadening specialism and senseless hedonism. Weber responds to this paradox by conceding that all endeavour will henceforth take the form of a specialism but that it can be rendered meaningful by a fundamentally inscrutable decision to devote oneself to a cause or vocation. For those called to politics this means accepting three ineluctable facts: that politics is a contest over the means of violence in which the "ethics of brotherhood" has no place; that freedom endures only when organizational machines are dominated by charismatic leaders; and that there are no criteria to determine political legitimacy except the subjective decision to act responsibly and not otherwise.

With Weber as both foil and problem, this study then explores the profound impact his pessimistic diagnosis of modernity, elitist account of politics, and subjectivist theory of ethics have had on Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre. Although very different in terms of philosophic background and commitment, these three are united by a critical urge to think beyond his dark prescriptions. Each begins with and largely accepts Weber's narrative of modernity, seeing in his account of rationalization and disenchantment an apposite description of the age. Each nonetheless rejects his understanding of the grounds and possibilities of politics, accusing him of complicity in the very realities he sought to resist. The central argument of this study, however, is that these thinkers simultaneously aid and hinder the attempt to think beyond the "iron cage," their thought both a critique of and yet an abutment to Weber's.

They aid in providing an alternative to subjectivism, Weber's neglect of the intersubjective constitution of political life. This alternative not only shows the untenability of his reduction of politics to dominative struggle and his normatively foreclosed understanding of legitimacy, but also helps recover suppressed political possibilities. Drawing from each thinker selectively, the conclusion is that a robust politics ensures the conditions of human flourishing and advances citizens' active capacities. However, these theorists hinder reappraisals of politics' potentialities in two decisive ways. In reaction to Weber's analysis of the "iron cage" they bifurcate political reality into free and fallen realms, with the result that pivotal arenas of human activity, administration, the economic, and even

the state, are depoliticized and thus distanced from critique. Similarly, in reaction to Weber's identification of politics with dominative struggle, they go to the opposite extreme of identifying the genuinely political with communication, "being-with," or dialectical conversation. A robust politics, instead, must avoid bifurcation and refuse to reduce the political to a singular logic.

Abbreviations

Max Weber

- ES - Economy and Society*
- GEH - General Economic History*
- PE - The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
- PV - "Politics as a Vocation"*
- PW - Weber: Political Writings*
- RRW - "Religious Rejections of the World"*
- SPWR - "The Social Psychology of World Religions"*
- SV - "Science as a Vocation"*

Jürgen Habermas

- BFN - Between Facts and Norms*
- BR - A Berlin Republic*
- CES - Communication and the Evolution of Society*
- IO - The Inclusion of the Other*
- JA - Justification and Application*
- MCCA - Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*
- NC - The New Conservatism*
- PDM - The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*
- PNC - The Postnational Constellation*
- STPS - The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*
- TCA, I - The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume I*
- TCA, II - The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume II*

Hannah Arendt

- BPF - Between Past and Future*
- CR - Crises of the Republic*
- EJ - Eichmann in Jerusalem*
- EU - Essays in Understanding*
- HC - The Human Condition*

LKPP - Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy

LM, I- Life of the Mind, Volume I

LM, II - Life of the Mind, Volume II

MDT - Men in Dark Times

OR - On Revolution

OT - The Origins of Totalitarianism

Alasdair MacIntyre

ASIA - Against the Self Images of the Age

AV - After Virtue

DRA - Dependent Rational Animals

PP - "Politics, Philosophy, and the Common Good"

SS - "Social Science Methodology as the Ideology of Bureaucratic Authority"

TRV - Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry

WJ - Whose Justice? Which Rationality?

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Introduction

It is often assumed by Anglo-American analytical thinkers that the discipline of political theory, the sustained enquiry into the challenges and possibilities of political life, lay moribund from the late 19th century until the publication of John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in 1971. This study rejects that simplistic and parochial view. Instead, it insists on a perceptible thread of reflection and theory stretching from the late 19th to the late 20th century, a thread, however, having its starting point not in Anglo-American thought but in the work of Max Weber. A figure straddling both centuries, Weber's impact on subsequent generations is undeniable. Having a formative influence on thinkers as diverse as Simmel, Parsons, and Schumpeter, he also inspired those schools of political science confidently professing the 1950s "end of ideology" thesis, the belief that in modern politics substantial change or reform is impossible and undesirable. However, his greatest impact was on those who rejected this and equivalent complacent theses. On the right were his pupils Roberto Michels and Carl Schmitt, who extrapolated from his reflections on modernity to vindicate Italian Fascism and *Führerdemokratie*. On the left stood his friend Georg Lukács and the Frankfurt School, a generation of critical thinkers who sought to uphold Marx's emancipatory project in the extreme circumstances of 20th century society. All were united by the Weberian insight that modernity represents a uniquely problematic moment, a trial of the West's conception of itself and of humanity as a whole.

The focus of this study is not Weber's social-scientific appropriators or his role in 1930s and 1940s Continental political thought, which is well documented, but his impact on three seminal political thinkers whose work has come to prominence in the last four decades: Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, and Alasdair MacIntyre. Although not strictly contemporaries, Arendt belonging to an earlier generation than Habermas and MacIntyre, their thought is defined by a fundamental preoccupation with problems first articulated by Weber. Underlying Weber's sociological and political reflections is an elementary concern, the "ordeal of personality" faced by the mature individual in the modern age (Turner, 1992: 166-170). This ordeal issues from two closely interrelated developments. The first is the process of "rationalization," of humanity reaching ever greater knowledge and technical mastery, which in late modernity culminates in the "iron cage" of bureaucratic routine and "mechanized petrification." The second is the process of "disenchantment," of divesting oneself of illusions, which concludes in the abandonment of individuals to a radical "polytheism" of warring values, none of which can claim rational superiority. These movements are paradoxical insofar as they began with an urge towards freedom and meaning

and yet conclude in bondage and meaninglessness. From this Weber urged a fundamental revaluation of traditional conceptions of the individual subject, ethics, and politics in the hope of preserving freedom and individuality from annihilation in a temporal context wherein these values appeared exhausted. The modern individual is abandoned to a world increasingly dominated by instrumental modes of thought and “machine-like” organizations and in which the only available values or ends are consciously chosen and willed values or ends. What prevents the threatened stultification of human life, its homogenization within the now ineluctable “iron cage,” is solely the individual’s faith-full decision to endorse a “cause,” whether scientific, political, artistic or religious. The tragedy of such choice is the impossibility of living a whole or integrated life and the truth that only those belonging to intellectual or political “aristocracies” can now shoulder the serious tasks of culture, the modern world being what it is. In politics the existential urgency of this choice is further compounded by the truth that in choosing to act politically one endangers one’s “soul,” since politics is fundamentally *and* desirably a matter of conflict and thus at odds with the “ethic of brotherliness.”

The core argument of this study is that Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre see in Weber’s vision an insightful diagnosis of the modern age, its inherent crisis character. But while Weber commended resignation to the “iron cage,” to the reduction of meaning or value to the inner will, and to politics as a realm of domination, these thinkers insist that there is still room for critique, for contesting and altering this state of affairs. Believing his thought both a diagnosis *and* a perpetuation of modernity’s ills, they defend alternative conceptions of the subject, ethics, and politics. These alternative conceptions, it is argued, show in combination a path beyond Weber’s “iron cage” and extreme subjectivism, hence their importance to the theorization of future political possibilities. However, it is a further key argument of this study that in thinking beyond the “iron cage,” Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre also close off important possibilities and in doing so blind us to some of politics’ principal challenges. In short, it is claimed that in reorienting theory towards an intersubjective account of the subject, reason, and action these thinkers arrive at a non-dominative vision of politics and a non-subjective account of ethics, but that this admirable achievement is undermined by a false dualist division of socio-political reality into “free” and “fallen” realms and a tendency to reduce politics to a foundational non-conflictual “logic.” This political Manichaeism and reductive turn are not unique to these thinkers but underlie much contemporary political theory.

In Chapter One we set the parameters of this argument by exploring Weber’s narrative of modernity. There we explain “rationalization,” “disenchantment” and his monist vision

of the “iron cage,” the belief that systematization and regimentation of life-conduct cuts across all spheres of human life, from the economic to the familial. We also pay attention to his uncompromisingly realist description of modern politics, legitimation and the antinomies governing political life, that is, the fated conflict between social order and individual action, instrumental political machines and individual value-commitment, bureaucratic-legal authority and charismatic domination. Deploring the “soft eudaemonistic outlook” which mistakes “political for ‘ethical’ ideals,” domination and conflict for equality and happiness, Weber insists that under the conditions of the modern state and capitalist economy a minimal space of freedom is preserved only by the rule of gifted leaders over bureaucratic machines and passive masses (*PW*: 27). To lend credence to our overall argument, we then provide a brief overview of Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre’s agreements with Weber, their rejection of his political prescriptions, and the shared aims and goals evinced in that rejection.

In Chapters Two, Three, and Four (Part I) we move to explore Jürgen Habermas’ response and alternative to Weber. Chapters Two and Three set out Habermas’ reconstruction of Weber’s rationalization thesis in terms of communicative reason and his consequent argument that modernity is not doomed to self-enslavement but defined by real emancipatory potentials, as was made clear by the 18th century bourgeois public sphere. Failing to take this into account, Weber inevitably concluded in a subjectivization of morality and an instrumentalized politics. This error, Habermas argues, is compounded by a failure to distinguish “lifeworld integration” from “systemic integration,” which led Weber to the dominative antinomy of leader and machine. A politics drawing on the communicative realms of civil society and the public sphere has the resources to resist the systemically defined administrative state and economy, thus upholding the ideals of solidarity and equal citizenship.

Chapter Four critically evaluates Habermas’ project. Here we argue that the move to an intersubjective conception of human identity undercuts Weber’s subjectivist account of ethics and politics and therefore provides a way of understanding the challenges of modern life without dismissing modernity as a whole. The important political consequence of Habermas’ intersubjective turn is the retrieval of “legitimacy” as a critical concept and of citizenship as potentially open to all. Yet Habermas cannot be endorsed in full. His separation of “ethics” (the good) from “morality” (the right) and insistence that only a minimal procedural morality can avoid Weber’s “polytheism of values” contradicts the squarely “ethical” grounds of his theory and indeed threatens a recrudescence of subjectivism. There is also the problem of his overly abstract understanding of critique and

emancipation, which mistakenly denies the constitutive role of experience. These philosophical difficulties are exacerbated by serious political shortcomings. Habermas' lifeworld-system dualism, his bifurcation or *ontological spatialization* of reality into communicative and strategic realms, ensnares him in the paradox of advocating radical democracy and yet consigning huge swathes of human activity, in particular governmental decision-making procedures and the economic, to a "norm-free sociality" largely impervious to democratic rule. Questioning this dualism and his enthusiasm for civil society, we are also led to question his opposition between communicative and strategic politics. Responding to Weber's one-sided stress on domination with an equally one-sided stress on mutual understanding and consensus, Habermas underestimates the possibility of *argumentative stalemate* and thereby neglects the *temporal urgency* or risk under which political life stands, the fact that decisions often have to be made under conditions of staunch dissensus, even hostility.

Hannah Arendt is the focus of Chapters Five, Six, and Seven (Part II). Emphasizing Arendt's distance from Habermas in Chapter Five, we move in Chapter Six to explicate her relation to Weber, her belief that modernity is characterized by "world alienation" or a loss of shared culture, the result, as Weber saw, of the modern turn in upon the self and the processes of capitalist expropriation. Yet Arendt accuses Weber of perpetuating this situation. His subjectivization of meaning and value further enfeebles the shared "common world," a failing buttressed by his reduction of political action to an instrumental means-end category. Fearing the consequences of this, in particular hubristic violence and totalitarianism, Arendt argues for a separation of "the social" and "the political" realms, the former encompassing the "necessities" of material reproduction and technical administration, the latter concerned with indeterminate tasks open to ceaseless reflection and "free" debate. Upheld by a complex of relationship where none is sovereign, the political realm is a fragile, contingent achievement brought into being by citizens constituting their polity through a fundamental act of promising and held together by friendship, a love of human plurality.

Chapter Seven clarifies the ways in which Arendt carries our argument forward. She is significant, we maintain, not only for augmenting Habermas' arguments regarding intersubjectivity and legitimation, but also for defending a robust ideal of citizenship that in demanding a transformation of the state itself challenges Weber's notion of government and avoids privileging civil society. Furthermore, her keen awareness of contingency and risk, the boundlessness and irreversibility of political deeds, provides an important correction to Habermas' thought without succumbing to Weberian political realism. There are substantial difficulties, however. In overreaction to instrumental conceptualizations of politics, Arendt

masks the purposive elements of all action and thus renders her account of political activity implausible. A similar problem dogs her theory of political judgement, whose dependence on the fiction of a disinterested “world spectator” unwittingly ends in a re-subjectivization of political reflection. These philosophical difficulties contribute to political weaknesses remarkably similar to those observable in Habermas. Although advocating a radical transformation of government and state, Arendt’s sharp separation of “social” and “political” concerns, “necessity” and “freedom,” leads to a relegation of administration and the economic to technocratic domination and therefore to a politics that reinforces, rather than contests, Weber’s “iron cage.” With Habermas, as well, Arendt tries to exclude the strategic, enmity, from the authentically “political” and consequently overlooks the problem of *remainder*, the truth that every polity is founded on particular promises which are inevitably contested. The result is that her conception of citizenship and understanding of political risk are far less compelling than they might have been.

Chapters Eight, Nine, and Ten (Part III) examine the ways in which Alasdair MacIntyre represents an advance upon Habermas and Arendt. Defending MacIntyre against liberal caricatures in Chapter Eight, in Chapter Nine we document his agreement with Weber that formal rationalization and capitalism end in an abjuration of uniquely human powers that belies any cheerful faith in “progress.” But while Weber deplores the fragmentary character of modern life, his antinomical dynamic between charismatic leaders and managerial machines in fact reinforces this fragmentation. Hence MacIntyre’s turn to the idea of “practice,” a conception of action and reasoning that in combining purposes and values into an integrated whole and stressing the ethical-normative dimensions of all human activity, avoids Weber’s binary of subjective value-commitment and instrumental calculation. Guided by notions of the “good” or human flourishing, practical reasoning is a historically rooted learning process in which human beings attain reflective independence, an independence premised, nonetheless, on embeddedness within vulnerable “networks of giving and receiving.” Sidelined in modernity, a politics of practice endures only in those communities which resist the manipulative intrusions of oligarchic markets and states.

The success of MacIntyre’s attempt to transcend the “iron cage” is assessed in Chapter Ten. Rejecting moral proceduralism and “disinterested” accounts of judgement, he is significant for recognizing the political priority of the “good” and for providing a conception of ethical reasoning that offers a concrete, experience-centred understanding of emancipation without yielding to Weberian subjectivism. His most important contribution, however, is a non-dualist theorization of political practice that intimates a recovery of “system” and “the social” as realms constitutive of human identity and therefore the proper focus of ethical

critique. However, MacIntyre relinquishes many of these gains. Thinking modernity wholly degenerate, he holds to a nostalgic vision of pre-modern societies that sits ill with his reliance on modern modes of thought and undermines his account of ethical learning. A further effect of this nostalgia is that his laudable non-dichotomous theorization of practice succumbs to a dichotomous division of local community and state reminiscent of Habermas and Arendt's bifurcations, thus lending support to their view of large-scale organization as "fallen." Moreover, in reaction to Weber's radically agonistic conception of the cosmos, the incessant war of "gods and demons," MacIntyre defends a metaphysic where all human endeavour appears as endeavour towards a singular good or *summum bonum*. Not only does this metaphysic deny the objective heterogeneity of human goods and the possibility of ethical dilemmas, but it encourages a vision of politics where the ineradicable role of compromise, opposition, and struggle suffers occlusion.

This study concludes, in Chapter Eleven, with an assessment of the challenges and possibilities of political life in a post-Weberian era. Drawing from our critique of Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre's attempt to break beyond the "iron cage," we offer three arguments. The first relates to conceptualizations of the modern subject and the goal of political endeavour. Stressing intersubjectivity, we maintain that politics is fundamentally concerned with questions of human flourishing, with the nurturing, facilitation, and encouragement of individual maturity, and that this perfectionist orientation does not entail a denial of value pluralism or a surreptitious embrace of tyranny. Our second argument concerns the prevalent and yet pernicious tendency towards dualist accounts of socio-political reality. Spurning contemporary celebrations of civil society, we argue that dualist theories lead to large areas of life being arbitrarily excluded from critical reflection and to the privileging of politically peripheral over politically pre-eminent realms. By contrast, a truly critical politics takes the view that all spheres of life impact upon human identity and are therefore open to change, but it rejects Weber's metaphor of "mechanized petrification" in demanding an internal transformation of large-scale organization, the state and economy. In our final argument we reflect upon the problem of political ethics. Because an emphasis on mutual understanding or friendship is no less a distortion than an emphasis on domination or conflict, we defend a mediating position that acknowledges the entwining of communication with coercion, friendship with hostility. Awareness of the need to engage in strategy and sometimes even to coerce does not lead to Weber's embrace of "diabolical powers" or a blunt amorality, but to an ethical conception of strategy which stresses the necessity of moderation and care. It is this moderation and care alone that prevent human deeds from degenerating into atrocity, thereby preserving hope.

Chapter 1

Modernity, 20th Century Political Crisis, and Max Weber

“He who seeks the salvation of the soul, of his own and of others, should not seek it along the avenue of politics, for the quite different tasks of politics can only be solved by violence”
(*PV*: 126).

To understand the crisis character of modern politics is to understand Max Weber. On the basis of this claim, this study advances a threefold argument as regards the political theories propounded by Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, and Alasdair MacIntyre. The first stage in this argument is to show that Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre, three very different thinkers, are bound together by Weber’s thought, each beginning and largely concurring with his diagnosis of modernity. In his account of society as increasingly regimented and meaningless, of politics as a struggle over the means of domination, and of ethics as a question of the inner will, they recognize, we will argue, the challenges faced by modern men and women. This leads to the second stage in our argument, the attempt to explain why, despite their indebtedness, they reject his conclusions. For various reasons and to different ends, but united by a critical urge to think beyond the present, Habermas, Arendt and MacIntyre dispute Weber’s depiction of the grounds and possibilities of political life, thinking him complicit in the realities he sought to resist. The third stage in our argument, however, is to show how in moving beyond Weber these thinkers both aid *and* hinder our understanding of these possibilities. Advancing an intersubjective vision of political and ethical life, they rightly contest Weber’s equation of politics with domination and of ethics with an unfathomable inner will, but at the unfortunate and unnecessary cost of dividing reality into “free” and “fallen” realms and of ridding politics of contestation, struggle.

Here we lay the foundations of this threefold argument by exploring Weber’s understanding of modernity and of modern politics. We begin by explaining why modernity emerges in his thought as a predicament that nonetheless has to be affirmed (Ch 1.I.). Weber’s radical ambivalence towards the modern age hinges on two momentous themes, the world-historical process of *rationalization* and the fate of the free individual in an era of *disenchantment*. As themes they encapsulate the crisis nature of modern politics, insofar as rationalization tragically concludes in an “iron cage” of bureaucratic routine and specialization which negates human freedom and cultured achievement, themselves paradoxically the products of the same rationalization process.

Having set out his theory of rationalization and disenchantment, we then explore Weber's account of politics and his vision of mature or responsible personhood (Ch 1.II). Resigned to the truth that all activity now takes the form of a specialism, Weber argues that a minimally meaningful way of life can be achieved by a fundamental act of choice between the antagonistic realms of art, science, religion, and politics. For the responsible politician, the *Verantwortungsethiker*, this choice demands acceptance of three fundamental facts: that politics is an elitist sphere of violence utterly inimical to the religious "ethics of brotherliness"; that modern politics is inevitably machine-like, dependent on a bureaucratic apparatus; and that political life cannot be justified or legitimated by reference to shared values, since politics is an instrumental means which admits of a radical plurality of conflicting values. Arguing from these facts and his belief that ethics and normative justification reduce to a question of individual decision, Weber insists that meaning and freedom endure only if exceptional individuals assume control over political machines so as to dominate and steer the passive mass of modern citizens. We then conclude with a brief outline of the responses offered by Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre to Weber's "anti-prophetic prophecy," their belief that his thought is both a diagnosis and yet a perpetuation of the "iron cage" (Ch 1.III.). This outline provides a necessary background to the claims and arguments subsequently defended in Parts I, II, and III.

1.1.) Occidental Rationalization and Polytheistic Disenchantment

Weber approached the problem of modernity in his role as a social scientist. A central presupposition of his “interpretive sociology” is the individual rationalizing subject as the fundamental unit of analysis. All action, that is, behaviour distinguished by conscious or semi-conscious intention, has meaning only if it arises from individuals or individuals acting in groups; all else is the product of non-rational habituation or biological impulse. That key opposition between meaning and animal-like habituation leads not to idealism, for Weber fully recognized the full importance of “material interests,” but rather to an understanding of social action attuned to the normally slight, but sometimes world-altering role of ideas, as can be seen, for instance, in the charismatic genesis of salvation religions (*SPWR*: 280). In Weber’s view it is imperative to free sociology from the romantic “nonsense” of “collective concepts,” which are frequently disingenuous slogans for partisan political ends (Weber, quoted in Stammer, 1971: 115). Spurning the politicization of scholarly research by conservatives and radicals in Wilhemine Germany, their transformation of “nation” into “Nation” and “class” into “Class,” a central impulse to Weber’s methodological individualism is, consequently, a desire to ground a value-free (*werturteilsfrei*) science.

Weber affirmed the methodological stricture to render facts unto the scientist and values unto the preacher because he deemed all scientific attempts to ground political orders a species of gross self-deception. Truth and value are equally important, yet perfectly separable. His understanding of scientific practice stresses personal integrity as coming-to-clarity, and in this sense draws from the Kantian project of epistemic critique, which is premised on the claim that human knowledge is constructed and limited knowledge. But Weber explicitly disavows the emancipatory sense of Kantian critique and thus sets himself apart from the majority of Kant’s appropriators, both liberal and radical.¹ The goal of science and of interpretive sociology in particular is not to provide a guide to emancipatory endeavour or to change the world, but to investigate that world in all its chaos and to submit one’s investigations to empirical falsification (*SV*: 145). Weber believed that as regards *facts* one could know them. Yet the attempt to come to an intersubjective rational appreciation or justification of *ideals* or *values* is conceptually impossible, since values reside primarily within the heart of the individual and issue from norm-originating prophecy or, which has often been overlooked, are the products of quasi-biological determination (Turner & Factor,

1994: 86-90). Values can be rationalized, that is, rendered ever more coherent and principled (*Wertsteigerung*), and such has been absolutely crucial to the development of the West, but this rationalization rests on an epistemologically ungraspable and inscrutable commitment (*SV*: 152; 1949: 55). Every significant human accomplishment originates from a fundamentally irrational yea-saying, even science, for science requires a commitment to truth, a love of honesty.² But although the scientist must feel the mysterious attraction of truth and must, as well, interpret each object of study in light of the relevance it has for his own culture, its contingent values and epistemological interests, truth *is* achievable by those with the integrity and responsibility to see reality unadorned.³

This methodologically and ethically ordained separation of fact and value explains why Weber understands his historical and general-sociological studies as providing a *diagnosis* of, rather than a philosophical mediation upon, the modern age. By “modernity” Weber means the unique contemporary constellation of the Western world, and to comprehend the origins of this constellation he introduces the interrelated concepts of “rationalization” and “disenchantment.” Rationalization denotes the multifaceted and contingent processes that human thought and action have undergone through time and are still undergoing. It means both humankind’s conscious attempt to make the cosmos and life ever more *intelligible*, involving increasing knowledge and value-coherence, and the desire to increase *mastery*, control, over every aspect of the world. So understood, there are three interwoven and yet in many ways antagonistic strands to Occidental rationalization: it means an advance in *substantive rationality*, in terms of ultimate and often “otherworldly” values being rendered ever more coherent in thought and in life-conduct; an advance in terms of *theoretical rationality* or intellectual conceptualizations of the world, that is, metaphysics and science; and, finally, an advance in terms of *formal rationality*, that is, increasing codification or routinization of behaviour and ever more efficient techniques or methods of control. These varied strands highlight the perspectivism at the heart of Weber’s theory. Something is “rational” only from a specific perspective, religious asceticism being incomprehensible to the hedonist, and “value,” in general, being “irrational” from a formal-rational viewpoint (*SPWR*: 293-294; *PE*: 37-38, 140).

¹ As Weber saw it, “far from a true social science revealing the potential for liberation ... it began by imposing even greater order on the world than the confused aspiration of individuals could manage, and ended by showing just how chaotic life really was” (Albrow, 1990: 157).

² (*SV*: 143). On the “rationalization” of value and the inscrutability of commitment, see Albrow (1990: 60-62, 124-125), Kalberg (1980), and Turner (1992: 163).

Underlying these rationalization strands and their accompanying forms of rationality is Weber's (*ES*: 24-26) ideal-typical categorization of the forms of social action. Weber speaks of purposive-rational (*zweckrational*) action as a form of action orientated to calculating the most efficient deployment of objects and human beings as means to an actor's given ends. Value-rational (*wertrational*) action, conversely, consists in the adherence to an ultimate value, such as beauty, goodness, or duty, for its own sake and regardless of success. These two forms of action underpin formal and substantive rationality respectively, and are in their pure form "limiting cases," the one devoid of moral reference, the other a fanatic moralism (*ES*: 26). Because theoretical rationality, however, connotes cognitive processes, it has only an indirect link to action (Kalberg, 1980: 1149). The remaining action-types are the "affectual" (*affektuell*) and traditional, both of which are defined as non-rational because of being largely unconscious. Affectual or emotionally charged action is action determined by the feelings of the actor. Although distinct, affectual action can transform into value-rational action once actors reflect upon their emotions, a point key, for Weber, to grasping how revolutionary impulses and charismatic prophecies undergo substantive rationalization. Traditional action concerns actions done on the basis of unconscious habituation and custom. Everyday life generally takes this form; it is a mix of purposive-rational or value-rational action that has become unreflective. Once reflected upon, however, traditional action can transform into "value-rational" or "purposive-rational" action. Weber (*ES*: 26) insists that these modes of action are simply ideal-types, which in reality are quite mixed and whose classificatory "usefulness" can "only be judged in terms of its results."

Although Weber explores rationalization in its various forms, his main concern is with formal rationalization, which he thinks has come to dominate the modern West. Thus the task of his sociology is to explore how a purposive mode of action guided by formal and calculating modes of thought gained contingent ascendancy over other modes of human action and thought, in particular the substantive or value-rational, and why, consequently, "culture" appeared to face extirpation (Kalberg, 1980: 1176). In this context a central theme in Weber's work is religious prophecy's effect on forms of "economic rationalism," by which he means the modes of everyday, practical life (*PE*: xxxix; *GEH*: 354; *SPWR*: 293). In everyday life material interests and purposive-rational means-end calculations predominate, yet these interests and calculations are shaped by the remnants of once visible ethical-religious values. Not actual theological doctrines, but their psychological and social

³ "Reality" is infinitely complex and allows only partial views of the "whole," but these partial insights depend on separating fact from value, how things are and how we want them to be (Weber, 1949).

consequences, how they have been applied to everyday activity, have been of momentous significance in the West's transformation (*PE*: 137-138). In Weber's view religion, now deemed irrational by a hegemonic science to which it gave birth, was the prime engine of rationalization in driving humanity from nature to culture, by which he means the living of a mature, reflective, or free way of life (*RRW*: 357). The origins of rationalization lie in the magical and "natural" pre-history of man. Culture arose in the turn against magical polytheism, the primal adherence to nature deities, towards an intellectualized and ever more consistent monotheism, as embodied in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, that sought to render suffering comprehensible, "rational," by showing that the world "in its totality is, could, and should somehow be a meaningful 'cosmos'" (*SPWR*: 273, 281).

It is Weber's fundamental claim that a tragic irony permeates this turn. Religion's theodicies, the metaphysical well-spring of reflective appraisals of the world and of the "ethics of brotherliness" underpinning the Abrahamic faiths, provoke a historical movement of which religion itself, in the end, falls victim (*SPWR*: 281; *RRW*: 351). This is evinced most clearly in the fate of the early modern Puritan. Puritanism plays a pivotal role in Weber's thought insofar as the Puritan's "systematic rational ordering of the moral life as whole" represents the culmination of Western rationalization, the affirmation of self-discipline and responsibility as the defining attributes of mature individuality (*PE*: 47, 73, 79). However, assured of salvation in his calling to a God-glorifying labour, the Puritan could not have known that his austere and world-altering values would, in industrial capitalism, finally give way to a "nullity" that imagines "it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved" (*PE*: 124). A nullity because the religious urge to render the mysterious intelligible suffers extinction at the hands of an unthinking discipline which religion itself helped bring about by forcing all activity to conform to an ascetic ideal of methodical life-conduct that subsequently divested itself of any value-rational orientation. And a false civilization insofar as the urge to move beyond animal nature to culture, to a state of conscious and deliberate mastery of the world and a reflective understanding of it, ends in "mechanized petrification" and unreflective hedonism (*PE*: 124).

Weber also explains this paradoxical process in terms of a historically unfolding conflict between *individual action* and *social order*, this conflict taking the form of an antinomical dynamic between value-originating *charisma*, which in the form of prophecies gave rise to substantive rationalizations of religious-ethical worldviews, and the necessary *routinization* of charisma and worldviews into institutional forms. Drawing from Protestant theology, he defines charisma as "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of

which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities”(ES: 241). For Weber charisma in whatever form captures the *vital* element of human existence, that which is novel and uniquely individual.⁴ The *origin* of every belief system and every institutional form, no matter how regimented it may now appear, is generally some charismatic figure or moment.⁵ Prophecy is revolutionary in demanding a break with the past, for the prophet “like the genuine military leader and every true leader in this sense, precedes, creates, or demands new *obligations*” (ES: 243; SPWR: 285, 296). In order to endure over time, however, these extraordinary and socially precarious obligations require both conscious substantive rationalization and “routinization” (*Veralltäglichung*) into durable and therefore ordinary institutional forms (ES: 246-254, 1121-1123). Routinization can be of a traditional or bureaucratic-legal kind, largely depending on whether hierarchical positions are decided by custom or by calculable tests and qualifications. In the modern West the latter form increasingly wins out, because the traditional represents a profoundly non-rational uncreative force, whereas formal rationality facilitates the growth and expansion of novel modes of organization. The problem, however, with modern bureaucratic-legal routinization is that its rigid instrumental formalism now threatens to evaporate the substantive well-springs of its own development, the originary charisma of the great individual and the substantive rationalization he inspired suffering dissipation.

Although Weber places strict qualifications on his rationalization thesis, the implication is that it outlines a contingent world-historical movement having a retrospectively discernible path. The end-point of that movement finds trenchant portrayal in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-1905), where he argues that the movement of modernity consists in a ruthless, progressively secular *systematization* of thought and activity (PE: xxviii-xxxiii). Apart from the idea of increasing coherence, systematization entails the elimination of uncertainties and a progressive increase in clear and replicable patterns of behaviour. Here it is important to recognize that Weber holds to a *monist* understanding of the fate of the West, a vision of ineluctable systematization across all spatial boundaries and spheres of life, the *totality* of human activities (Barnes, 1995: 208). Thus, intellectual enquiry has become wedded to the rational method of experimentation and subordinated to the criteria of rational proof, as has historical scholarship (SV: 134). Music and architecture

⁴ Charisma also refers to the magnetism of the “inner demon” guiding one’s vocation and the “allure” of metaphysical and aesthetic worldviews (RRW: 354).

⁵ “Prophecies have released the world from magic and in doing so have created the basis for our modern science and technology, and for capitalism” (GEH: 362). See Mommsen (1989: 150-151).

are organized according to the ever greater calculation of sounds through notation and orchestral divisions and a repeatable, principled utilization of line and spatial perspective. The university, the state and the political party as phenomena unique to the West are now dependent upon a division of labour that facilitates subject- and task-specialization and necessitates highly developed bureaucratic hierarchies with sophisticated techniques of control. These bureaucratic hierarchies are “machine-like” insofar as their division into higher and lower offices, dependence on abstract rules and trained officials, use of files, and specialization of functions enable a “monocratic” organizational structure ideally suited to the instrumental and predictable achievement of policy goals (*ES*: 220-221, 956-958). Life in the modern West would be unthinkable without these organizations and their specially trained officials, for it is their expert and formally superior knowledge that underpins and facilitates modern mass democracy and the mass economy (*ES*: 223).

Lastly, the modern West is the age of the “expectation of profit by the utilization of opportunities for exchange, that is on (formally) peaceful chances for profit,” in other words, capitalism (*PE*: xxxii). Radically impersonal, dependent on exact calculations of profit and loss, requiring a formally free pool of labour and calculable modes of production, modern or “rational” capitalism is the apotheosis of Western systematization. Pivotal here is the growth of formal-rational procedures in the organization of an expropriated labour and of an expropriated officialdom. By “expropriation” Weber (*PW*: 279-281) means, with Marx, the separation of the worker from the means of production and of the official from ownership of office accomplished respectively by corporations and the state. Warfare became the first mode of human activity to be expropriated when Cromwell’s Army of Saints substituted unwavering discipline for Cavalier dilettantism (*PE*: 247). Other spheres followed analogous paths. With the partial exception of the family and the erotic, politics, economics, law, and science (the university) all became increasingly depersonalized and efficient (*PV*: 81-82; *SV*: 131). As regards capitalist expropriation and the formally free market, Weber is quite clear that they bring an enormous and desirable increase in material productivity, but they do so at the cost of smothering “spontaneous human relations” and of unleashing an uncontrolled consumerism (*ES*: 636; *GEH*: 357). The substantive values that defined the high cultural watermark of Western civilization, in particular the urge towards reflection and a universal “ethic of brotherliness,” therefore suffer extirpation. No longer a locus of creative and self-creative energies, the individual appears now as a quantitative unit to be administered according to precise regulations and contented with material goods. Formal rationality, the obsession with categorization and regularity, combines with a blind purposive

rationality, a closed relation of means to ends, to sideline values that might otherwise lend these ends sense. In 1932 Karl Löwith (1982: 47-48) provided a classic summary of this process, foreshadowing Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947):

That which was originally a mere means ... becomes itself an end or an end in itself. ... This reversal marks the whole of modern civilization, whose arrangements, institutions and activities are so "rationalized" that whereas humanity once established itself within them, now it is they which enclose and determine humanity like an "iron cage." Human conduct, from which these institutions originally arose, must now in turn adapt to its own creation which has escaped the control of its creator.

For Weber, then, the "iron cage" of bureaucracy and capitalism is the endpoint of a millennia long movement from humanity's natural uncultured infancy to civilized maturity (PE: 123; ES: 1402). The sad truth is that maturity, the freedom to consciously will one's ends, becomes subordinated to the very means by which it came into being. Rationalization liberates and enslaves. What is left, in Goethe's words, is merely "'specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart'" (PE: 124).

Yet Weber is concerned not just with the loss of freedom in modernity, but also with the meaninglessness of a rationalized world, its having become thoroughly *disenchanted*. As with "rationalization," "disenchantment" (*Entzauberung*) has several cognate referents. On the simplest level it denotes the process of de-magification effected in the primeval turn from magical symbolism to religion (SV: 139). As a religious development, this culminated in the radical Puritan rejection of Catholicism's priestly powers; of all religions, Puritanism is the most "disenchanted" in its extreme hostility to magical sacraments and strict conception of an unknowable, otherworldly deity (SPWR: 290). More generally, because of intellectualization and science, modern human beings, if they wished, could fully know the workings of their environment and world. No longer do "mysterious incalculable forces ... come into play" and no longer do we need recourse to magical charms to master reality, for technical means and calculation have usurped the sorcerer (SV: 139). Significantly, however, disenchantment also refers to the disappearance of moral certainty, the loss of "objectivities" around which one could mould one's life. Whereas "mechanized petrification" refers to the formalized social structures in which people find themselves, disenchantment concerns the effect of a polyvocal rationalization on their personalities. The one designates the triumph of a single rationalization strand, the other the *differentiation* or splitting up of reason itself.

Though born of the religious, metaphysical impulse to render suffering and the universe meaningful, science paradoxically concludes by asserting the "chaos" of that universe, its

true *lack* of meaning (*RRW*: 352, 355). Indeed, the modern world is one where none can become “satiated” or content with life, since all possibilities for a sense-conferring “unity” have been irreparably closed off by the gradual rupture and subsequent advance of the internal logics of the life-spheres (*Lebenssphäre*) of art, politics, economics, religion (ethics), science, and erotic intimacy. These realms assume meanings of their own and, as cultural values, are tied to an inexorable process of advancement or “progress” that impels them along mutually antagonistic paths. Art is beautiful, as Nietzsche saw, precisely to the extent that it is *not* good; science true to the extent it is unbeautiful and ungood; and ethics good on account of being blind to beauty and deaf to truth (*SV*: 147-148). Scarred by fundamental antagonisms, the West has lost the unifying ethical core previously bestowed by Christianity and has, instead, embraced a plurality of values whose nature it is to forever conflict. The irony here is not to be neglected: from polytheism rationalization sprang and to it it returns, albeit this time a disenchanting polytheism.⁶ Humanity being thrown back upon itself, suffering and death become meaningless, which entails in turn the meaninglessness of culture:

... for civilized man death has no meaning. It has none because the individual life of civilized man, placed into an infinite “progress,” according to its own imminent meaning should never come to an end; for there is always a further step ahead of one who stands in the march of progress. And no man who comes to die stands upon the peak which lies in infinity. ... He catches only the most minute part of what the life of spirit brings forth ever anew, and what seizes is always something provisional and not definitive, and therefore death for him is a meaningless occurrence. And because death is meaningless, civilized life as such is meaningless; by its very “progressiveness” it gives death the imprint of meaninglessness (*SV*: 139-140; *RRW*: 357).

Gone then is a trust in salvation which underpinned the universal “ethic of brotherliness.” In its place are “unbrotherly aristocracies” of particularist cultural commitment demanding the worship of one deity to the exclusion of others (*RRW*: 354-355; *PE*: 74-76). Combined with the unbrotherly Puritan turning in upon the self and belief in predestination, this new polytheism cut the individual irrevocably off from his fellow human beings and from a sense of being at home in the world (*PE*: 63-64, 101). Forced to endure the homogenizing effects of external organizational forms, the individual paradoxically experiences her inner life as a mad battle of “gods and demons.”

⁶ We live as the “ancients did when their world was not yet disenchanted of its gods and demons, only ... the bearing of man has been disenchanted and denuded of its mystical but inward genuine plasticity” (*SV*: 148).

1.II.) Maturity, Politics, and *Beruf*

The ordeal faced by modern human beings is having to live the lonely “inner-worldliness,” insecurity of values, and alienating impersonality defining the modern age.⁷ Where Marx believed “the abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of men, is a demand for their *real* happiness,” Weber sees a very different development, the opening up and then closing off of human potentialities (Giddens, 1971: 215, quoting Marx, 1964: 44). The great scientific and economic successes of the age rely on systematization, and Weber makes clear that he values these in and for themselves, as well as for their indispensability to mass society. At no other time have organizations been so efficient, at no other time has the productivity of managerial knowledge been so great. Disenchantment, too, is embraced, for it means escape from illusions, explaining why Weber admired the Puritan’s “rigorous asceticism” and determination to view the world unadorned. But these are at best ambiguous successes. The humane dilettantism of the cultivated man, the Chinese Mandarin or the English gentleman, is no longer possible. “Fate” has dictated that all work and cultural activity be performed as a “useful” specialism (*PE*: 19-20, 123; 1948: 243). Specialization certainly contributes to the real advancement of cultural logics, but it also means the impossibility of living a meaningfully whole or integrated life.

Yet Weber saw a minimal chance for individuals to assert a *subjectively* felt sense of meaning. A fundamental article of his faith, this chance acquires substance in the notion of “vocation” (*Beruf*), of being inexplicably called to a “cause” or way of life. That specialization is unavoidable means, in Weber’s view, that only through self-conscious devotion to a cause “strangely intoxicating” one’s soul is authentic personhood achievable (*SV*: 135-136). Aware of the loss involved in this devotion, he stubbornly insists nothing else can conscionably be done, pouring scorn on those romantics and religious who yield to irrational sensualism or worn Church dogmas (*SV*: 155). Praying futilely for prophets in a prophetless time, their “intellectual sacrifice” guiltily refuses to affirm the cold reality that mature personalities embrace (*RRW*: 352-355).

This honest existentialist pathos informs Weber’s attempt to envisage a liberal politics attuned to the strictures of sociology. Here a despairing disbelief in long-cherished liberal dogmas joins with a tenacious insistence on liberal ideals, the individual as the ultimate

⁷ On the Puritan’s lonely “inner-worldliness,” his being *in* yet not *of* the world, which stands for Weber as a metaphor for modernity in general, see (*PE*: 60, 101, 259; *SPWR*: 291; *RRW*: 349).

source of value.⁸ He breaks with the tradition of Western political thought in rejecting all talk of natural law, participatory democracy, or freedom as the destiny of humanity, scientific rigour impelling him toward an unrelenting political realism. Political realism in Weber's sense has nothing to do with "metaphysical" or "moral" realism, the claim that the universe is directly knowable or that our moral beliefs have an objective status; rather, it refers to the assumption that politics is a realm of warring interests where truth or morality play a minor role.⁹ This realism forces Weber to the conclusion that under modern conditions the attempt to realize "true" democracy would lead to rule by wealthy dilettantes, wasteful incompetence, and general instability (*ES*: 948-952; Held, 1987: 148-150). Admirable in intent, time-honoured normative ideals are crushed upon the rocks of the present. The problem, then, is how to fuse a disenchanting acceptance of the present with a sense of responsible personhood watchful of individual prerogatives and freedoms. Weber's answer relies upon a value judgement which takes the "facts" of political life into account.

What are these "facts"? An essentially coercive *means* to any number of good and evil ends, politics is defined not by justice or virtue but by a timeless dominion of man over man:

It is not possible to define a political association --- not even a "state" --- through an account of the *purposes* of its action ... there has been no purpose which political associations have *not* on some occasion pursued. Thus one can define the "political" character of an association *only* through the *means* --- which, though not peculiar to it, is at all events indispensable for its nature: violence (*Gewaltsamkeit*) (*ES*: 55).

Governed by a means-end rationality where success stands paramount, politics is an "ethically irrational" sphere in which cherished values ceaselessly clash with and wither before the necessity to coerce. Political life increasingly demands the discipline necessitated by the appearance of mass society yet, just as in the case of capitalism, this discipline threatens individual liberty. Thus, caught between the realities of mass society and a commitment to individuality as an ultimate value, Weber's political thought abounds with antinomies of which he is acutely aware. Democracy, supposedly premised on popular sovereignty and equality, is now a matter of party and therefore machine-like organization. Yet, although opposed, democracy and bureaucracy stand interlinked. The impetus towards democracy, that is, the removal of patrimonial privilege, demands the levelling effects of

⁸ Weber rejected old liberal dogmas, because he felt "how profoundly liberal thought and liberal ways of life were under threat in this modern world" (Mommsen, 1989: 23; Lassman & Speirs: 1994: xix).

⁹ See McMahan (1991: 384) and Smith (1991). It is important to stress the gulf between these meanings of "realism," since a modest moral realism is defended below (Ch 4.II.ii, 10.I.i, 11.II.).

bureaucratic organization, even though this “impartial administration” threatens to engulf democratic ends (*PV*: 95).

“The central question,” for Weber (1924: 412), was therefore to find a way to limit the scope of this necessary bureaucratic “machinery in order to preserve a remnant of humanity from [a] fragmentation of the soul.” What preserves an optimum of freedom is not the naïve illusion of equal participation, but a “plebiscitary democracy” headed by strong and authoritative leaders who, though kept in check by constitutional parliamentarism, rule according to their own judgements alone.¹⁰ Hence Weber’s (*PW*: 308) claim that the elected president, the *Reichspräsident* who uses mass demagoguery, is the “palladium of genuine democracy, which does not mean impotent self-abandonment to cliques but subordination to leaders one has chosen for oneself.” Behind this antinomy between machine and leader lies the opposition between *Zweckrationalität* and *Wertrationalität*, as well as the antinomical dynamic between formal routinization and charisma, order and initiative. For democracy to be effective there must be clear procedures and party officials, but these in turn have to be bound by charismatic rule, that is, the charged personality of the gifted individual and his commands. Wedded to the ideal of liberal individuality, Weber nonetheless accepts as inevitable the division of modern humanity into a politically active few, a caste of trained yet subordinate technocrats, and an “intellectually proletarianized” passive mass (*PV*: 99, 113).

On the level of states, moreover, there exists the further antinomy between adhering to liberal values and a nationalist, at times imperialist, foreign policy. Early commentators, such as Löwith (1932), ignored this dimension, but it is beyond doubt that in Weber’s worldview the nation and the individual have equal significance.¹¹ His liberalism and nationalism are responses to the same phenomenon, a homogenization of culture that can be slowed only by the cultivation of *competition* on intranational and international levels. National preservation and individual freedom were, to his mind, inextricably linked; without powerful leaders Germany would fall victim to the dominance of either Anglo-American or Russian culture, the one already mechanistically petrified, the other tyrannous (*PW*: 75-79). The idea of competition informs, as well, his reluctant but firm endorsement of capitalism. Capitalism is the “iron cage,” an immense cosmos in which modern man is destined to toil. Yet in capitalist societies it remains at least possible for the entrepreneur to act in a conscious and,

¹⁰ Weber’s (*PW*: 304-308, 351) disillusionment with post-war German politics underlies this “solution.” However, the idea of exceptional leaders arising from party and parliamentary struggle defines the whole of his work, “Caesarism” being an inevitable feature of democracy (*PW*: 222).

¹¹ See, for instance, Raymond Aron (in Stammer, 1971) and Wolfgang Mommsen (1959, 1989), who stress the imperialist currents of Weber’s politics. For a stark expression of these currents, see Weber’s Freiberg *Antrittsrede* (*PW*: 1-28).

therefore, minimally free manner. Under socialism, especially an international socialism, even this minimal liberty would fall away before the transformation of state officialdom into an impregnable “shell of bondage” (*ES*: 1402, 1453).

The dynamic between entrepreneurs and monocratic corporations, as well as the dynamic between leaders and their machines, issues directly from the deeper dynamic between two interdependent yet mutually antagonistic forms of authority, that of charismatic and bureaucratic-legal authority. Weber’s theory of authority or “legitimate domination” (*Herrschaft*), “the probability that a command with a specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons,” again shows his distance from traditional political thought (*ES*: 53). He accepts the traditional view of authority as the legitimate power (*Macht*) of a person or group to command obedience from others who accept this command as valid, and yet minimizes the traditional philosophical concern with normative justification, since sociology is concerned with fact, not value. But despite this narrowed use of the term, legitimate domination is pivotal to Weber’s political sociology, providing a solution to a major theoretical quandary. Although a sociologist, “society” as such did not exist for Weber; what did exist were individual motivations for action and regularities of action. In rejecting collective concepts such as “national spirit” or “class consciousness,” however, Weber is left with a peculiar difficulty: if he cannot have recourse to collective concepts or the idea of a general will, if these are but illusions, how then can he account for the continuance of groups and group organization?

For Weber the necessary link between individual motivations and continuous social orders is achieved through the idea of “belief in legitimacy.”¹² When individuals attribute legitimacy to an order they express their belief that it is in some way right, proper. To this extent the “legitimate” is connected with an “ought,” but this “ought” can take a plurality of forms, most of which are irrational. Weber divides these largely heteronomous obligating beliefs into four sub-categories. These are a belief in “that which has always been,” that is, *tradition*; belief by virtue of emotional “faith ... [in the] revealed or exemplary,” charisma; belief in “that which has been deduced as an absolute,” *value-rational* belief; and, finally, belief by virtue of an order’s *legality* (*ES*: 36). From the third sub-division it might be inferred that normative belief is central to *Herrschaft*, and Weber does in fact say that natural law reasoning played an important role within Western social orders (*ES*: 37, 865-880).

¹² (*ES*: 31, 213). As Albrow (1990: 174) argues, it is through “legitimacy” that Weber secured “a loop back between motives and beliefs, providing the conceptual possibility for a common order to arise out of the various and conflicting individual motivations, without ever postulating a common will.”

However, it is not necessary for ethical norms *per se* to underpin authority structures. Unconscious habituation is equally effective here, and the sorts of ethical belief that might fulfil this role are so diverse that the authority-relations upheld admit of infinity. One might adhere value-rationally to an order either because it embodies the principle of divine kingship or is premised on Caucasian superiority. Thus, when Weber comes to expound his typology of legitimate domination he refers simply to traditional, charismatic, and legal *Herrschaft*, since value-rational orientation, in the strict sense of rationally chosen norms of action, is both rare and unlike “‘revealed [charismatic], enacted, and traditional law’ ... can [only] support or fail to support *particular* positive orders, but cannot serve as a positive order by itself.”¹³ Compounding this is the fact that for Weber, authority means command and obedience, which entails in turn that the ruled *surrender* their capacity for moral agency, whether coerced or not (*ES*: 215).

To endure a political system needs to continually justify itself by appealing to the “principles of its legitimation” (*ES*: 954), be it the charisma of a prophet or legal correctness. In modern social orders bureaucratic-legal authority, the “belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands,” has gained an unassailable pre-eminence (*ES*: 215). Understood by Weber as a positively prescribed system of rules and procedures whose validation rests on the form of the legal system itself and not on extraneous normative values, modern law sets the conditions by which states and enterprises can govern society and exchange in the market. But here Weber solves the puzzle of group maintenance in modernity only to face another problem, although one he rarely voiced. In short, his sociology of domination and law, in being premised on the positivist view that legitimacy is to be conceived “as the probability that to a relevant degree the appropriate attitudes will exist and the corresponding conduct ensue,” has no means by which to distinguish well-founded justification from dissembling, rule from wanton oppression, his key idea being *de facto* belief in legitimacy and *not* the substance of such belief, whether it is in truth warranted.¹⁴ As a consequence, when Weber comes to delineate his ideal of political vocation, this necessarily takes the form of a subjective entreaty or cry.

That entreaty appears all the more impassioned given the centrality of the political sphere and its clash with ethics, as Weber perceived it. Violence *is* politics, “the reasons of

¹³ Turner & Factor (1994: 102, quoting *ES*: 37). My reading of Weber here also relies on Beetham (1985: 264-267; 1991: 6-34), Habermas (*TCA*, I: 243-271), and Mommsen (1989: 19-22).

state,” its “power pragma,” following their own inexorable laws bound by no notion of moral right (*RRW*: 334). A cold impersonality and lack of love are virtuous prerequisites in this realm, especially under conditions of the modern bureaucratic state. That is not to claim Weber thought politics a mere instrument, as a realm having no significance of its own. In fact the opposite is true. He defined it as a means, the use of legitimate violence, but that definition does not capture its cultural importance. Politics assumes a *sui generis* significance in two interrelated ways. First, as an *autonomous* cultural sphere whose dignity inheres in the conscious embrace of force (*RRW*: 335). Whereas the ancient *polis* managed to reconcile religion and politics in the figure of the city-deity (Athena), modern politics concerns solely the “internal and external distribution of power” and thus sets itself up as a rival to the religious-ethical salvation (*RRW*: 333-334). It is in the extreme moment of war that political life assumes a self-contained meaning destructive of compassionate brotherliness. To freely embrace death on the battlefield represents the supreme political event because in that embrace the warrior places a conscious imprint on what would have otherwise been a senseless biological process.¹⁵

But politics is more than this partisan dignity, the affirmation of life in death. The second dimension has to do with politics’ *relation* to the other cultural spheres (*Lebenssphäre*) and, specifically, the ordeal of personality suffered by modern human beings in that relation. Because employed in the struggle of any number of diverse ends --- religious, economic, *and* aesthetic --- politics has significance commensurate to, indeed greater than, the other spheres (Albrow, 1990: 166; Turner, 1992: 147-150). Thus, where previous thinkers privileged religion, Weber privileges the political, insofar as the political furnishes a fraught, mediating point for cultural value-conflict and the initiation of new social orders. He does not privilege the political as *essence*, some enduring conception of the nature of action, which is ruled out by his four-fold ideal-typical typology of social action, but rather as a prime formative mode of his personality ideal, human beings as beings defined by consciously affirmed vocations.

Politics yields the prime formative mode of mature personalities because it is in this realm that the existential need to make character generating choices assumes greatest significance. Other cultural value spheres, the spheres of science and of religion, for example, entail basic presuppositional commitments necessary for activity within those

¹⁴ (*ES*: 214). Mommsen (1989: 21) gives this clear articulation: “for Max Weber ‘illegitimate domination’ could not exist at all as a type, but there could only ever be a greater or lesser degree of empirically extent consent to legitimacy.” See also Stammer (1971: 114).

spheres. These core values are non-disputable, must be accepted or rejected for participation within each activity. As a means, however, politics rests on no such presupposition: the actor may act on the basis of any value commitment, even none at all. In politics, then, the individual must decide which god or demon will govern his soul and in this decision he has no compass or guide but himself. In so choosing he also has to accept that the tragedy of politics, that it is doomed to conflict with the ethical injunction to love one's neighbour, is further exacerbated by the truth that "the final result of political action ... regularly stands in completely inadequate and often even paradoxical relation to its original meaning" (*PV*: 117). It is only by affirming this paradox that actors can become true individuals and impress upon political life a conscious substantive form, thus rendering their deeds genuinely "legitimate," albeit only from the perspective of their inner cause. To explicate this possibility, Weber arrives at a worldly ethic antagonistic in equal intensity to salvatory brotherliness and nihilistic power for power's sake.

Although politics ever confounds traditional ethical dictates and conscience, the actor can respond to political tragedy in three distinctive ways, of which only one is an authentically political ethic. The first is hardly ethical at all, the response of the *Machtpolitiker* who acts for the sake of power only and whose posing is as vulgar as it is dangerous (*PV*: 116). If this "worthless creature" bothers with it, ethics becomes in his hands merely a cynical tool for self-aggrandizement. The second, however, that of the "ethics of conviction" or "absolute ends," is capable of a certain nobility. Here actors, and Weber means specifically those pacifists and socialists whom he opposed before and during World War I, act strictly according to the inner flame of their beloved cause. Consequences are immaterial here, for if intentions be frustrated it is not the actor or his cause that is at fault, rather the world (*PV*: 121). Thus the *Gesinnungsethiker* adheres to Christ's Sermon of the Mount to the endangerment of himself and of others in repudiating a care for the outcome of his deeds. A "cosmic ethical rationalist" blind to the conflict of ethics and politics and obsessed with inner purity, he dooms himself and others to ineffectual fanaticism (*PV*: 122; *RRW*: 339; *PW*: 298).

The authentic politician or *Verantwortungsethiker*, however, adheres to an "ethics of responsibility" in recognizing the ethical paradoxes of political action, that to act successfully he must contract with "diabolical powers," must align himself to a following of unthinking "spoilsmen" kept in line by the strictest of impersonal discipline, and must, when

¹⁵ "Death on the field of battle differs from ... merely unavoidable dying in that war, and in this massiveness *only* in war, the individual can *believe* he is dying 'for' something" (*RRW*: 335).

the needs of the day demand, employ dangerous means to uncertain ends (*PV*: 123). Three qualities distinguish the responsible politician, who to a remarkable degree resembles Weber's Puritan. First, passionate devotion to a cause imbues his every action, yet that passion is no "sterile excitation" but rather *matter-of-factness*, the transformation of oneself into an instrument whose use will secure the ends desired. Matter-of-factness requires a *feeling of responsibility*, a care for the success of his action and a personal willingness to stand by it when challenged. He therefore combines value-rational and purposive-rational action in every deed and is aware that knowing when the end justifies the means relies on the intricacies of each situation (*PV*: 122). Last, responsibility means having a *sense of proportion*, of being able to distance himself from "things and men" so as "to let realities work upon him with inner concentration and calmness" (*PV*: 115). Like the scientist, the *Verantwortungsethiker* strives to rid himself of illusions by rendering his cause conceptually coherent and by evaluating it in terms of its probable practical consequences (*SV*: 151-152). Knowing that politics is a "strong and slow boring of hard boards," the responsible politician devoted to a "'cause,' to the god or demon who is its overlord," accepts the "power-pragma" with which he has contracted and yet holds out for the "impossible" (*PV*: 128, 117). By "impossible" Weber means not the fantasies of the *Gesinnungsethiker*; rather, he means goals whose realization is unlikely, but whose pursuit is dictated by the heart and decided by the head in such a way as to turn aspiration into possibility (*PV*: 128). To decide what is "impossible" in this sense of a worthy, yet fragile goal and what is "fantasy" demands the insight of "a leader, and not only a leader but a hero as well, in a very sober sense of the word" (*PV*: 128). It was the absence of any social stratum equal to this task in post-war Germany and the willingness of the bourgeoisie to give themselves over either to complacency or to socialist "illusions" which made Weber despair of securing a stable political future for his homeland, a despair, however, to which he never fully succumbed.

Ascetic and yet passionate. Weber's chosen ethic fuses the Puritan ideal of an iron inner and outer adherence to revered "ultimate values" with a Nietzschean celebration of self-realizing personalities, a fusion which incorporates the dictates of science, that the actor be willing to subject her cause to critical reflection and allow reality to work upon it.¹⁶ Only the *Verantwortungsethiker* can heal the gap in Weber's theory of legitimate domination and instil an ethic that is not mere dissembling. In this role he imagines a leader fully cognizant of modernity's polytheism, but nonetheless fully dedicated to preserving the minimal space

¹⁶ On the conflicting Nietzschean and Puritan-Kantian dimensions of Weber's personality ideal, see Albrow (1990: 42-54), Aron (1971: 90-100), and Turner (1996: ix).

for individual movement and self-determination. This is the meaning of the existential *choice* between responsibility and the “ethics of conviction,” a choice, however, which is radically unstable. Indeed, as Weber admitted, the responsible politician stands precariously close to the *Gesinnungsethiker* in that he, too, must adhere to a cause and must, when circumstances dictate, exclaim with Luther: “Here I stand, I can no other.” Having declared socialism irredeemably and contemptibly absolutist, Weber in the end concedes that responsibility and conviction are not “absolute contrasts but rather supplements, which only in unison constitute a genuine man --- a man who *can* have the ‘calling for politics’” (*PV*: 127). The dynamic, irresolvable antinomies underlying his work repeat themselves once more with vivid intensity. The charismatic heroism of the leader presumes the workings of the machine; dreams of freedom and justice are declared illusory even though heroes are called for; the intense commitment of a value-rationally oriented action requires and yet conflicts with a cold purposively directed action; responsibility clashes with absolute conviction, but absolute conviction turns out to be the basis of all responsibility.

1.III.) Anti-Prophetic Prophecy, Pessimism, and Hope

A supreme irony pervades Weber's ideal of political vocation and solution to "mechanized petrification." He derided the dogmatists and romantics for their "intellectual sacrifice," their refusal to accept disenchantment and "measure up to a *workaday* existence" of "a godless and prophetless time" (*SV*: 147, 153). And yet his understanding of political life and of the limits of political action, responsibility, depends in like manner on "intellectual sacrifice." In a disenchanted age no one can know whether responsible action is the right course. One can only feel this as a commitment within one's soul, and this commitment, since premised on a faith in human effort which no science can uphold, itself entails a certain re-enchanting of reality, something already implied by Weber's use of the Lutheran term *Beruf*, where the individual submits his entire being to the allure of his chosen cause. Authentic politics, one able to endure darkness and defeat, in the end derives its strength, legitimacy, and contour from the individual's willed choice, his free, anxiety ridden, and fateful decision to *believe* it capable of decency and freedom and not otherwise.

This irony is not lost on Habermas, Arendt, or MacIntyre. They see in Weber an anti-prophetic prophet of a powerful sort, one whose words have indelibly marked 20th century life. His negative avowal that in modernity all hope of "imitating Buddha, Jesus, or Francis" is vain hope, portends the usurpation of attempts to institute freedom or emancipatory ideals by a pervasive bureaucratic-legal rationality (*RRW*: 357). It joins with the positive, yet unsure prophecy as to the enduring possibility of maintaining an unfragmented self through engagement in vocations. But to prophesy is to go beyond the "bounds" of science and therefore, perhaps, to err. Weber is to Arendt, Habermas, and MacIntyre, then, as Marx was to Weber, profoundly perceptive and yet fundamentally wrong in certain key perceptions. Weber was fascinated by *The Communist Manifesto*'s melding of prophecy and scholarship, insightful in its appreciation of capitalism and yet erroneously inspired in its faith that capitalism would one day give way to communism and justice. However, the "inspired error" he (*PW*: 288) ascribes to Marx can just as easily be ascribed to his vision of the "end of prophecy," to the triumph of bureaucratic-legal rationality and the "iron cage." Thus, where Weber (*PW*: 15) urges a heroic pessimism, "*lasciate ogni speranza*" (abandon all hope), these three thinkers urge hope.

In the following chapters it will become clear that the dissatisfactions and hopes expressed by Habermas cannot be equated with those articulated by Arendt or MacIntyre, the discrete vocabularies and multiple implications of their work being subsumable under no single category. Yet in their dependence upon Weber's theory of modernity and modern

politics, a substantial unity of orientation does come into view. For Habermas (1994a: 60) Weber is crucial “to a philosophically and scientifically informed diagnosis of our time”; for Arendt (*HC*: 277) the “only historian who raised the question” of modernity “with the depth and relevance corresponding to its importance”; and for MacIntyre (*AV*: 86) “the key to much of the modern age.” He is important, they argue, because of his perception that responsible personhood stands threatened by systematization and meaninglessness, the products of “colonization” in Habermas’ view, of “world alienation” in Arendt’s, or of what MacIntyre calls “bureaucratic individualism.” Each likewise concurs with Weber (*PW*: 15) when he declares that the “question which stirs us as we think beyond the grave of our generation is not the [material] *well-being* human beings will enjoy in the future but what kind of people they will *be*.” But while they agree on the ethical centrality of mature personhood and the dangers of closed specialism and unfettered hedonism, they nonetheless spurn his response to the “iron cage.” Insightful, certainly, yet his vision of the modern world stands guilty of either presenting a pessimistically one-sided description of modernity (Habermas), of being complicit in the perpetuation of the problems of modern society (Arendt), or of ignoring aspects of human life and social-political organization which might counter or at least resist those problems (MacIntyre).

In critiquing Weber these three have different and frequently contradictory ends in mind, drawing as they do from the diverse philosophical traditions of neo-Kantianism, 20th century Continental phenomenology, and neo-Aristotelianism. However, underlying is a shared dismissal of Weber’s radical decisionism, that the only value is willed value. This decisionism issues from his understanding of action and his subjectivization of meaning. Unable to imagine a mode of action unbound to the inner will and a site of value other than that of the individual subject, Weber’s thought was foredoomed to fall into an arbitrary affirmation of exceptional leaders and their mode of rule, violence. The fate of which he spoke admiringly and yet which he railed against in his preference for a “politics of responsibility,” is the fate of the modern isolated subject. Rejecting that subject, Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre also reject Weber’s personality ideal and political ethic. Simply put, responsibility is not just chosen; it inheres in the very process of engaging with others in political life, a process misunderstood and indeed undermined by Weberian *Herrschaft*. The resuscitation of an ascetic and unbrotherly Puritanism in the form of the *Verantwortungsethiker* ironically reinforces the dangers which responsible action should in fact contain. A political virtuoso dependent on the subordination of others, the *Verantwortungsethiker* sustains a politics where citizens are matter to be dominated and

moulded according to aristocratically decreed designs. Nostalgia for the “heroic age of capitalism,” that is, the Puritan era, therefore leads Weber to repeat Calvin’s myth of the reprobate and the elect, a myth which he nevertheless condemned for its “extreme inhumanity” (PE: 111, 60).

Striking commonalities also inform their alternatives to Weber’s political vision. We will see that in each case Weber’s isolated subject is rejected in favour of an intersubjective subject defined either in terms of communicative action, a plural world-building *praxis*, or the idea of shared, historically rooted practices. This intersubjective subject provides the basis for a conception of reason or political deliberation oriented not to instrumental mastery over the world and fellow human beings, but to a non-manipulative politics premised on the realization of elementary human potentialities. Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre understand political deliberation and human potentiality differently, and these different understandings conflict, yet underlying is a wish to recover “legitimacy” as a critical and intrinsically normative concept. Repudiating value-scepticism, their goal is to break beyond the antinomial dynamic of charismatic and bureaucratic-legal authority impelling Weber’s division of humanity into active leaders, instrumental machines, and the passive mass. Their success here varies significantly, but in endeavouring to circumvent this antinomy each substitutes a dualist account of political reality for his spatially monist understanding of the fate of the West. Where Weber sees “mechanized petrification” as occurring across all boundaries or spheres of life, they argue that there are realms of existence where systematization has not yet taken hold or which offer successful resistance to its processes. Habermas’ “bourgeois public sphere,” Arendt’s “political realm,” and MacIntyre’s “local community of practice” stand in direct opposition to “system,” “the social,” and the capitalist market and state as sites for an authentic politics in which speech, debate, and practical reasoning displace violence and coercion.

Our goal now is to explore the diverse reflections of Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre and to develop the core argument of this study. One element of this argument, it will be recalled, is that these thinkers are indispensable to the attempt to think beyond the “iron cage.” Thus, it is only by combining their various insights into the generation of human identities and values, citizenship, and the modes of political action that Weber’s decisionism and austere political realism can be overcome. However, the other element of this argument is that they also hinder a reflective appreciation of the possibilities and challenges of political life. Some failings are unique, yet the more fundamental are shared, suggesting that the

difficulties encountered are not confined to these thinkers alone but possess a general significance.

Part I

Jürgen Habermas and The Project of Modernity

Chapter 2

Introduction

Of our three thinkers Jürgen Habermas stands closest to Weber and thus it is appropriate to commence with his understanding of modernity and the possibilities of modern politics. Habermas' thought has assuredly taken dramatic turns over the course of five decades but Weber has remained an inspiration and problem throughout, on the one hand providing Habermas with key resources by which to theorize the present, on the other proving an obstacle in the path of emancipatory politics. Chapters Three and Four therefore explore Habermas' complex relation to Weberian theory and politics in line with the threefold interpretive scheme and argument underpinning this study. The aim throughout is to come to an appreciation of his significance for contemporary politics and also to establish a framework for our subsequent discussions of Arendt and MacIntyre.

Our first task, then, is to illuminate Habermas' indebtedness to Weber's diagnosis of modernity, in particular his account of rationalization, disenchantment, and the movement towards individual maturity entailed by these processes. This indebtedness shows forth in his reworking of Weber's rationalization thesis in terms of an evolutionary division between pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional forms of consciousness and society. It is also evident in his agreement that this process has been contradictory, promising enlightenment and freedom and yet apparently condemning actors to an "iron cage" of unfreedom and meaninglessness.

The theme of contradictory rationalization brings us to the second stage in our argument. As already claimed, Habermas places significant qualifications on Weber's diagnosis of modernity and indeed thinks him complicit in the very realities he sought to resist. Weber's political realism, elitism, and pessimism are due to his preoccupation with instrumental or technical rationalization and scepticism towards non-decisionist theories of normative evaluation, both consequences of an adherence to the Cartesian "philosophy of consciousness" paradigm. He is thus inevitably led to the view that in politics questions of value are entirely subjective and that ordinary citizens are and must be subordinate to self-assertive leaders whose domination of bureaucratic machines renders them fit to rule. For Habermas this view is both false and replete with dangers. Because Weber's interpretation of norms and ideals under the image of an assertive self-will renders such norms and ideals rationally incomprehensible, the instrumental calculation of means and ends, which is a matter of non-subjective fact, assumes the mantle of "reason" and with it success becomes

the overriding goal. This elevation of success means, in turn, that there exist no internal normative limits to the violence with which rulers might pursue their ends. Violence is simply contained by external reasons: whether it will effectively contribute to willed ends, whether it would produce self-destructive resistance.

To avoid the severe consequences of an unbound instrumentalism and to redeem modernity as enduring ideal, Habermas turns to everyday speech as a repository of a non-instrumental rationality, communicative reason. Embracing Kantian critique in both its emancipatory and epistemic senses, Habermas' goal in analysing the structures of natural languages and of universal interactive competences is to transcend the self-destructive "dialectic of enlightenment," that the will to freedom ends in bondage, and to ground the possibility of what he calls *generalizable interests*, those which all share equally. If, contra Weber, it can be shown that such interests exist and if, too, they can be known, then he will have provided the theoretical resources for defending a non-arbitrary critical politics that eludes the scepticism underpinning moral subjectivism and the instrumentalist equation of rationality with efficiency or success. These resources are to be found within "morality," the activity of free subjects conjointly giving themselves the basic rules of their continued shared existence, which rests in turn on that strand of rationalization neglected by Weber, the *structural differentiation of the lifeworld*.

Rationalization consists in two world-historic movements, the growth in instrumental-functional and productive complexity, which Habermas associates with economic and administrative sub-systems under the label "modernization," and the increasing growth in reflexivity and reciprocity in interpersonal relations within the lifeworld spheres of the family and civil society. Both these rationalization strands represent evolutionary advances. The ambiguity of modernity, however, consists in the simple yet momentous fact that these strands have found themselves subject to imbalanced development (*TCA*, I: 140-145; 1986: 107). In short, complexity has overwhelmed the emancipatory potential underlying rationalized lifeworlds, a potential inhering in the very structures of communication. The task of critical theory, as Habermas understands it, is to illuminate the sources of that potential and to sensitize modern subjects to the opportunities for carrying it forward as a living project.

As will be seen, this project is understood in terms of a heavily reformulated, liberalized socialism. Rejecting the earlier socialist concern with material reproduction and deference to "revolutionary consciousness," Habermas' "radical reformist" or social democratic perspective focuses instead on the "possibility" of overcoming the one-sided instrumental or "capitalistic simplification of the process of rationalization" so that "humanity can

emancipate itself from self-imposed tutelage” (Horster, van Reigen, 1979: 43). A synergetic combination of Marx and Weber, wherein Marx’s critique of capitalism is read in terms of Weber’s rationalization thesis, is needed to resuscitate post-communist utopian energies in a way that neither repeats the excesses of communist fantasy nor falls victim to the neo-liberal status quo. Weber perceived quite clearly the advance brought by rationalization; his error was to concentrate on its instrumental aspect, which led him to surrender to the capitalist present. Marx was truly alive to the inequities of capitalism and its forms of domination; his error, however, was to fail to see that this was but *one* aspect of rationalization. Obsessed with production and still sentimentally tied to pre-modern labour forms, Marx misperceived the rationality potential of rationalized lifeworlds marked by reflexivity and reciprocity in human interrelations. Weber, for his part, let this insight succumb to the image of the “iron cage.” Together, however, they show that enlightened solidarity is the end towards which societies should progress if not frustrated by a regressive return to pre-modern metaphysical worldviews or crushed by “colonization,” that is, the subordination of communicative lifeworld logics to the instrumental-functional imperatives of the economy and bureaucratic state.

We are thereafter led to the third and most important stage of our argument, the contention that Habermas aids *and* hinders the attempt to theorize contemporary political possibilities. Habermas advances our understanding in highly significant ways. In his exploration of linguistic interaction he arrives at a conception of human identity formation stressing the intersubjectivity of this process, the fact that becoming an individual is *simultaneously* a matter of becoming a social being. This positive, intersubjective vision of healthy identity formation or “sociation” undercuts the grounds of Weberian subjectivism, the belief that normative evaluation is fundamentally the preserve of the individual alone. In doing so it also provides a positive non-arbitrary standard by which to critique instances of damaged intersubjectivity, socio-pathologies. With this standard Habermas can rearticulate Weber’s concern with the loss of freedom and meaning in modernity without succumbing to Weber’ totalising pessimism and thereby surrendering the modern ideals of “self-consciousness, self-determination, and self-realization” (*PDM*: 338). Habermas’ shifting of horizons onto the paradigm of intersubjectivity has a concomitant salutary effect on our conceptualization of politics. With politics now recognized as an intersubjective mode of life held together by interpersonal expectations and justifications, the untenability of Weber’s reduction of “the political” to domination becomes plain. The same, too, with his fateful equation of legitimacy with *belief* in legitimacy, an equation, which in distorting the character of political life, lends unwarranted force to political realism and legal positivism.

In these respects Habermas' challenge to Weber is of the utmost importance. When we come to discuss Arendt and MacIntyre, both of whom fundamentally concur with his re-orientation towards intersubjectivity, we will be building upon contributions already made by Habermasian critical theory. Yet these contributions are limited. As will be seen, certain failings specific to Habermas' theory lessen its attractiveness as a critical resource. The first concerns a key aspect of his attempted circumvention of subjectivism. In his discourse theory Habermas hopes to side-step Weber by separating "ethics" from "morality." Ethics concerns the substantive ends, values, or visions of the good human beings deem worthy of fulfilment, but which vary from individual to individual, culture to culture, and are therefore non-generalizable, a matter of subjective desires and conventional understandings. Morality, instead, concerns universal questions of "right" or the "self-determination" by individuals of the terms of their mutual co-existence, terms constrained by the procedural presuppositions or norms of communication. Conflating ethics with morality, Weber was led to discount the possibility of universal norms. The problem, however, is that Habermas' division between ethical values and moral norms does not hold, since the basis of his discourse theory of morality is in the last instance an understanding of healthy identity formation, that is, a substantive *ethical* vision. Far from circumventing subjectivism, then, his characterization of ethics as largely subjective or conventional ironically threatens to return us to it. This failing is further problematized, we will argue, by an abstract and reductive understanding of critique that disregards the historical specificity of moral-ethical reasoning and neglects the constitutive role of experience in the movement towards universality and emancipation.

In different ways MacIntyre and Arendt offer solutions to these and related problems. Nonetheless, there is a further complex of problems encountered in Habermas that is also present within Arendt and MacIntyre. In response to Weber's monist antinomy of the leader and machine, Habermas adopts a dualist framework in which the economy and the state are understood as "sub-systems" conforming to functionalist-strategic logics, in contrast to the communicative logic of the lifeworld, the realms of the family, civil society, and the public sphere. This dichotomy or "ontological spatialization" leads Habermas to privilege civil society and the public sphere as the sites of emancipatory politics. However, the resulting division between opinion-forming and decision-making competencies has the effect of weakening popular sovereignty and thus reinforcing Weberian elitism. More worryingly still, his contention that administration and the economy operate according to a "norm-free sociality" stifles possibilities for change in these arenas and arbitrarily denies labour's role in identity formation. The result, consequently, is a paradoxical politics extolling radical critique and yet retreating from it in resignation.

While Arendt and MacIntyre's bifurcations of reality into "free" and "fallen" realms differ from Habermas' in noteworthy ways, the effect is nevertheless the same: a perpetuation of Weber's vision of "mechanized petrification." A related shared weakness is the manner in which they respond to Weber's one-sided reduction of "the political." Where Weber reduces the essentially "political" to struggle, strategy, and domination, Habermas offers a conception of the political as a movement towards consensus and mutual understanding. This conception challenges Weber's equation of politics with domination but at the cost of inverting his error and excluding coercion, struggle, and antipathy from the horizon of authentically political activity. In seeking to theoretically neutralize the risks of struggle and strategy within a hierarchical complex of communicative interactions, ranging from moral discourse to fair bargaining, Habermas downplays the realities of discursive stalemate and entrenched disagreement in which communicative engagement frequently concludes. These realities and the problem of temporal urgency, the fact that actors *must* act whether or not agreement has been achieved, show the implausibility and, in some crucial respects, the undesirability of such attempts at theoretical neutralization, especially when they occlude the real moral-ethical challenges and decisions faced by citizens in times of crisis. Thus, while Habermas illuminates a path beyond Weber, that path cannot and should not be travelled in full.

Chapter 3

One-Sided Rationalization: Habermas on Modernity, Discourse, and Emancipation

“In complex societies, the scarcest resources are neither the productivity of a market economy nor the regulatory capacity of public administration. It is above all the resources of an exhausted economy of nature and of a disintegrating social solidarity that require a nurturing approach” (*BFN*: 445).

For Jürgen Habermas it is not poverty or powerlessness before nature that threatens the inhabitants of late modernity but the corrosion of social bonds and the diminution of individual freedom. Although consequences of the “project of modernity,” these threats can be answered only by augmenting that project’s emancipatory potential. Thus, we begin with Habermas’ celebration of the 18th century bourgeois public sphere (Ch 3.I.). Utilizing Weber’s theory of rationalization, but rejecting his pessimistic conclusions, Habermas argues that the bourgeois public sphere signified the first flowering of an evolutionary learning-process in human consciousness and interaction. On the basis of this rationalization process he develops his intersubjective model of “lifeworld” or “symbolic” reproduction and differentiates communicative from strategic interaction, thus contesting Weber’s equation of reason with the instrumental calculations of an isolated subject. Rejecting Weber’s “philosophy of consciousness” paradigm, Habermas is also led to his theory of discourse and division between morality (“right”) and ethics (“good”), which together promise a path beyond decisionism and the polytheism of warring values (Ch 3.II.).

However, that path is jeopardized by contrary currents in late modernity. Weber’s image of the “iron cage” points towards a second strand of rationalization, the processes of “systemic integration” in the realms of “material reproduction” and bureaucratic organization, the market and the administrative state (Ch 3.III). These sub-systems provide unprecedented levels of security and material wealth, but, having burgeoned out of control, now threaten to “colonize” the fragile lifeworld structures of the family and civil society, resulting in increasing citizen dependency and consumerization. To counter this one-sided rationalization and to avoid Weber’s antinomy of the leader and machine, Habermas argues for a form of deliberative democracy rooted in civil society and the public sphere (Ch 3.IV). In conjunction with a liberal constitutional state, this rejuvenated democracy has the capacity to stem the tide of colonization and to redeem the modern ideals of autonomy and solidarity.

3.I.) Modernity, the Bourgeois Public Sphere, and the Intersubjective Paradigm

Weber considered sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe the high point of modern civilization. Although profoundly ambiguous in his assessment of early modern capitalism and its central figure, the Puritan, he (*PE*: 5, 67) nonetheless believed that “the bourgeois classes ... have seldom before and never since displayed [such] heroism.” Puritanism was the “last of our heroisms” because “the Puritan’s serious attention to this world, his acceptance of his life in the world as a task,” entailed the maturation of Western humanity, the endorsement of self-discipline and iron resolve as the marks of true individuality (*PE*: 47). Burdened with “a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness,” the Puritan imposed on himself “a systematic rational ordering of the moral life as a whole” and thus brought to fruition a process of rationalization having begun in the transformation of mythic into religious worldviews (*PE*: 60, 79). The tragedy of this figure is that he freely embraced as a calling, the ascetic pursuit of wealth in the service of God, what would for later generations become an irresistible and unalterable economic order devoid of meaning. In the Puritan Weber sees the paradoxical fate of the West writ large, the movement towards maturity ending inevitably in “mechanized petrification.”

Habermas agrees that modernity is the age of humanity’s maturation. However, he disagrees fundamentally with Weber’s portrayal of the Puritan “Protestant ethic” as the high point of the modern age. The cold unbrotherliness of the Puritan, his disregard for others in the pursuit of material success, represents a perversion of the moral core of modernity.¹ That moral core first revealed itself not in Calvinism but in the Anabaptist sects, which rejected the “ascetic ethic of vocation --- with its egocentric foreshortening, particularism of grace, and conformity to the unbrotherliness of the capitalist economy” (*TCA*, I: 228, 232). In the eighteenth century the brotherly ethic of the Anabaptists was transformed into a secular universalism by the English, French and German bourgeoisie, who had by then emancipated themselves from Church dogmas and the unreflective piety of the peasantry (*TCA*, I: 230). For Habermas, then, it is the Enlightenment and its defining institution, the “bourgeois public sphere ... of private people come together as a public,” which constitute the defining moment of modernity (*STPS*: 27).

“Peculiar and without historical precedent,” the bourgeois public sphere was distinguished by its operative principle, “publicity” or the “people’s use of their reason (*öffentliches Raisonement*)” (*STPS*: 27-28; 1992c: 465). In this it differed dramatically from

the pseudo-public of the late medieval and early modern period, in which the monarch presented himself to his passive subjects “as an embodiment of some sort of ‘higher’ power” (STPS: 7). Replacing the court as the site of public attention, the salons, the coffee houses, the *Tischgesellschaften*, and the wider public of letters all became “centres of criticism” subjecting the power of the sovereign to sustained scrutiny and critique (STPS: 31-56). Born of the new capitalist market economy and of a reorientation of the conjugal family towards the ideals of “voluntariness,” “community of love,” and “cultivation,” these centres had three “institutional criteria” in common. Social intercourse was, in principle, devoid of status restrictions, the claims of title, wealth and distinction being bracketed out in favour of a “common humanity” guided by the principle that “the public use of one’s reason must always be free, [since] it alone can bring enlightenment among men” (STPS: 36, 106, quoting Kant). This meant that only “the authority of the better argument could assert itself.” Second, this critical argument knew no restrictions on its content; with the dissemination of philosophy, literature and periodicals such as the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, old boundaries on what could be said were overcome and the Church and court lost their interpretive monopoly over what constituted culture or morality. Third, and most important, the new public sphere was in principle *inclusive*.² All men of property and education, whether aristocrats, merchants, or well-to-do professionals, were able to converse on matters of common interest. This common interest was “civil society,” the sphere lying between the state and family, and it was to be served by subordinating the law, Parliament and the coercive apparatus of state, so long a realm of secret manipulation (*arcana imperii*), to “public opinion as the expression of reason” (STPS: 52, 54).

Lasting until the mid-nineteenth century, the “only blissful moment in the long history of capitalist development,” the bourgeois public sphere gave classic expression to the modern ideals of *autonomy*, the individual as free from the sovereign, and *solidarity*, the individual as free to associate with his equals, ideals which were to “become a future society’s norms of political equality” (STPS: 79; 1992b: 424). Weber’s claim that Puritanism represented *the* modern moment is therefore doubly wrong: in mistakenly privileging a form of life that placed individual salvation above the norms of personal freedom and responsive sociability; and in equating humanity’s maturation with a process of internal disciplining and of instrumental dominance over nature and other men. Although

¹ The Protestant ethic is not “the exemplary embodiment of the moral consciousness expressed to begin with in the religious ethic of brotherliness, but a distorted, highly irrational one” (TCA, I: 231).

² The illiterate, impoverished “masses” could not participate, but Habermas insists that the principle of inclusivity was not simply ideological, that “with the emergence of the diffuse public formed in the course of the commercialization of cultural production, a new social category arose” (STPS: 38).

subject to serious contradictions, not least the fact that it claimed to be universal and yet excluded women and the poor (*STPS*: 88; 1992b: 428), the bourgeois public sphere revealed that it is the ability to *communicate* with other human beings and to subject one's opinion to their judgement that defines mature, critical personhood.

Yet Habermas concurs with Weber on two counts. First, Weber was right to see the modern age as both a story of triumph *and* a story of decline. Just as Puritan asceticism gave way to utilitarian hedonism, so, too, did the critical public sphere give way to a realm of "manipulated opinion." This degeneration did not destroy the public sphere or the principle of "publicity," but it did seriously impair it, as will be seen (Ch 3.III.). Second, he was right to understand modernity as the culmination of a world-historic rationalization process (*TCA*, I: 143, 339). Thus, to support his contention that the bourgeois public sphere intimated a new principle of social integration, discursive solidarity, and to show that this principle is not confined to one period but rooted in the structures of human interaction itself, Habermas offers a reconstruction of Weber's narrative of Occidental rationalization. In this, however, his goal is also to develop an *intersubjective* conception of the human subject that rejects the monological, instrumental-rational subject underpinning Weber's thought and thereby disputes the pessimistic claim that rationalization is doomed to a tragic instrumentalization of social relations.

Habermas interprets Weber's "rationalization of worldviews" thesis as a general hypothesis to be approached in *developmental-logical* terms. By developmental-logical terms is meant that the social scientist retrospectively reconstructs the course of human evolution as a rationally comprehensible learning process in which the reflective powers of human beings increasingly win out over the unreflective.³ This reconstruction attends to the "*internal validity conditions*" that pattern and guide the growth in knowledge so as to uncover "anthropologically deep-seated structures" within the everyday know-how of ordinary subjects (*TCA*, I: 66-67; *TCA*, II: 383). Habermas' strategy here is to offer an affirmative reading of "disenchantment" understood in terms analogous to Jean Piaget's characterization of the movement in child cognition from a closed "egocentric" to a "decentred" reflective consciousness of the world. Disenchantment or "decentration" is not in itself destructive, indeed quite the opposite. Its negative aspects are attributable not to rationalization as such, but to a *pathological* one-sided rationalization where cognitive-instrumental or technical reason assumes inordinate proportions.

³ "We can speak of a developmental logic ... if the structures of historical frameworks vary within the scope defined by the structural constraints of communicative action not accidentally but directionally, that is, in dependence on learning processes" (*TCA*, II: 145).

Non-pathological disenchantment unfolds according to sequential stages both on ontogenetic (individual subject) and phylogenic (society) levels, as is suggested by George Herbert Mead's account of self-other relations, Lawrence Kohlberg's reconstruction of moral consciousness, and Durkheim's phylogenetic account of the movement from sacred to secular societies.⁴ What these theorists show is that the formation of individual identities is, first, dependent on "socialization," on the individual's becoming an individual by becoming a member of society, and that, second, the structure of such socialization takes a progressive form, such that at the highest stage a principled, autonomous individuality is secured. The movement from mythic, through religious-metaphysical, to modern secular societies --- the "linguistification of the sacred" --- is paralleled by a movement from preconventional, through conventional, to postconventional individual consciousness (*CES*: 97-100). With each transition there is an increase both in *reflexivity*, the level of self-reflection, and *reciprocity*, the ability to take on an increasing number of interactive roles, for instance, that of the speaker, addressee and observing listener in a debate (*MCCA*: 163). This increase means, as well, a greater ability to *integrate* encountered problems and conflicts within practical frameworks and an ever greater *differentiation* between forms of knowledge, together the distinguishing marks of modernity.

The learning processes generating modern cognitive and moral competences are interpreted by Habermas (2001b: 26) as universal and invariant across cultures. He is careful, nonetheless, to distinguish this reconstruction from *developmental dynamics*, the actual historical unfolding of societies or their "constellation of causality" (*TCA*, I: 194-195). Reflexivity and reciprocity embody the "naturalistic core" of mature personhood insofar as the logic of human interaction both stems from and points towards their realization (*MCCA*: 170). As conditions of knowledge, they are what we *presume* when we interact as autonomous yet socialized beings. However, the achievement of this interactive competence occurred over a long period of time and according to a particular historical narrative. When talking of developmental dynamics, Habermas (1991a: 239) speaks in the role of a sociologist oriented to the actual course of events that through a contingent succession of catastrophes, crises, and advancements concluded in the as yet uncertain victory of modernity. This role is methodologically distinguishable from that of the moral or psychological theorist who as a reconstructive scientist retraces in a rational manner the advance from lower to higher stages of learning. This theorist illuminates the context-

⁴ On Mead, see (*TCA*, II: 3-43; 1992a: 149-204); on Kohlberg, (*CES*: 69-94; *MCCA*: 116-194; *JA*: 113-132); and on Durkheim, (*TCA*, II: 43-111). See, as well, (*TCA*, II: 378), White (1988: 48-66, 90-123), Honneth & Joas (1988: 160-162), and Outhwaite (1994: 68-108).

exploding significance of a reason differentiated according to its distinct moments; his research program is guided by this key idea, which must, nevertheless, subsequently find empirical confirmation (*MCCA*: 39-40). Habermas' "weak evolutionism" finds empirical confirmation ultimately, he contends, in the actual division of cultural value spheres, new forms of social interaction and family life, and an ascendant democratic constitutionalism, developments which show that modernity, as a mode of social interaction and consciousness, is on the *whole* superior to pre-modernity despite the calamities that have accompanied the modern era (*TCA*, I: 68, 341; *PDM*: 344; 1988: 263-265).

This idea of an empirically grounded evolutionary logic underlies what Habermas calls the "structural differentiation of the lifeworld" (*TCA*, II: 119). By "lifeworld" Habermas intends the intersubjective horizon of pre-given space and pre-theoretical knowledge and assumptions in which people exist, act, and interact (*TCA*, II: 131-139). This space forms the background to all we are, do, or can be and consequently has a "taken-for-granted" quality prior to agreement or disagreement. Although this "taken-for-granted" quality can never be fully transcended, when faced sudden problematic occurrences lifeworld inhabitants are forced to embark upon transformative learning processes. A "rationalized lifeworld" is therefore one that has undergone the formal differentiation and re-integration intimated by Weber and explained by Piaget, Mead, Kohlberg, and Durkheim (*TCA*, I 340). The core idea is that with rationalization the cohesion of social orders increasingly issues more from "rationally motivated" agreement than from customary beliefs and pre-reflective mores (*TCA*, I: 70; *PDM*: 321).

Habermas' understanding of lifeworld rationalization defies easy summary. In brief, he argues for an interconnected process of differentiation which begins with the dissolution of the naïve everyday world into the *objective*, *intersubjective*, and *subjective worlds*, each world encapsulating a realm of human experience, of nature, of culture and society, of the self and inner feeling (*TCA*, I: 75-79; *TCA*, II: 120-126). Arising from this division of reality into three worlds or realms is the structural differentiation of the lifeworld into the components of *culture*, *society*, and *personality* (*TCA*, II: 140-141). Culture refers to a stock of knowledge, memories and myths that endure through time; society to the norms, values, laws, and customs interrelating diverse subjects; and personality to the cognitive, linguistic and emotional capacities of individual subjects. As structural components, they are reproduced, in turn, by the specific lifeworld reproductive processes of cultural *knowledge transmission*, the *social integration* of children into established activities, and their *socialization*, that is, the simultaneous internalization of external authority and development of unique identities. To each of the reproductive processes corresponds, as well, specific

reproductive mechanisms or functions. Cultural knowledge requires *understanding*; social integration forms of *co-ordination*; and socialisation the development of *responsible individuals* (TCA, II: 137). These intersubjective functions together ensure the endurance of lifeworlds and communities through time.

When the “culture” component sub-divides into *science*, *morality-law*, and *art*, each “rationality complex” directs itself to a particular form of knowledge guided by a specific validity claim expressible in language: the cognitive-instrumental sphere of science and technology to *truth*; the moral-practical sphere of morality and law to *rightness*; and the aesthetic-practical or ethical-existential sphere of art, eroticism, and subjective existence to *truthfulness* or *authenticity* (TCA, I: 329). Here Habermas relies explicitly on Weber’s arguments regarding the separation of cultural “value spheres” (Ch 1.1.), the three domains of his architectonic presuming a simultaneous differentiation and accumulation of knowledge (TCA, I: 237-242). This differentiated accumulation is accompanied by a gradual separation of form from content, a growing reflexivity as regards the renewal and transmission of knowledge, and an increasing critical perspective on social institutions. With the turn towards post-conventional society, the individual’s ego-identity also becomes more and more abstract, less rooted in the traditional or customary. Following Weber, Habermas argues that differentiation needs no philosophical justification, it being an incontrovertible fact that “the sons and daughters of modernity have progressively learned to differentiate their cultural tradition ... such that they deal with issues of truth, justice, and taste discretely rather than simultaneously” (MCCA: 17). However, what it does need, and what Weber failed to provide, is some integrating device, some primary conception of rationality, to explain this multifaceted appropriation of knowledge potentials.

Habermas finds it in the idea of communicative action and reason, which yields the lynchpin holding the different strands of his theory into a coherent whole. Given the disintegration of religious and metaphysical worldviews, reason now must be understood post-metaphysically not as residing within some noumenal realm or “Absolute” of world history, but rather as within the presuppositions of speech (PDM: 322; 1992a: 51, 142). Hence Habermas’ view that communication constitutes nothing less than the *principle of lifeworld sociation* or reproduction (TCA, I: 337). What this means is that the reflective symbolic achievements of cultural knowledge, of social integration, and of identity formation, the paths along which a distinctly human life is formed, issue from the attempt to *reach understanding* through speech, the “cooperative interpretation process” of ordinary subjects (TCA, II: 146).

Here Habermas distinguishes “communicative action” from “purposive action.” Purposive action underlies Weber’s action-theory, which in starting from the consciousness and intentions of the individual subject pictures all activity as the attainment of subjective ends.⁵ As an action type, it sub-divides into both “instrumental” and “strategic action.” When actors reason instrumentally, they reason according to technical criteria as to the best means to possible ends on the basis of empirical facts; when they reason strategically, they reason from the basis of preferred ends where things *and* people are seen as mere resources to those ends (*TCA*, I: 284; 1996b: 53-54). Governing instrumental and strategic action are the criteria of *efficiency* and *success*. Governing communicative reason, by contrast, is the internal telos of “mutual understanding.”

By “mutual understanding” Habermas means something very specific. *Minimally*, understanding utterances depends on their grammatical well-formedness and an awareness of the basic conditions under which hearers could be motivated by speakers to accept the truth or related validity-claim of an utterance.⁶ However, Habermas intends a stronger sense than this. Understanding is not just the understanding of “mere” meaning, that is, the intelligibility of utterances (“this is X”) and the conditions requisite for the possibility of redeeming their validity claims. Rather, understanding in an *emphatic* or *maximal* sense means reaching agreement or *consensus*. In other words, for genuine communication to continue, actors must “take a reasoned position” on the claims made by speakers, adopt an affirmative, negative, or reserved stance that is directed towards “rationally motivated assent” (*TCA*, I: 287; 1991a: 237).

Communicative action has certainly a goal, the mutual definition of action situations in the world, but this goal is not achieved through *perlocutionary* effects, that is, getting others to believe something indirectly through threats, cajoling or deception, but rather through *illocutionary* acts, that is, by acting through openly saying something to the other that can be understood as valid, as either true, right, or truthful/authentic (*TCA*, I: 288-295). Whereas “meaning,” “validity” and “intention” coincide in communicative action, in strategic or perlocutionary speech acts what matters is simply the “intention” of the actor, the consequences or ends he or she wishes to achieve. In other words, the illocutionary element

⁵ For Weber “what counts as fundamental is not the interpersonal relation between at least two speaking and acting subjects --- a relation that refers back to reaching understanding in language --- but the purposive activity of the solitary acting subject” (*TCA*, I 279). Because solitary, the activity of this subject is *necessarily* instrumental, even when motivated by *wertrational* considerations.

⁶ See (*TCA*, I: 298-300), White (1988: 25-66), Rasmussen (1990: 37-55), Outhwaite (1994: 38-57), Apel (1995: 276), and Warnke (1995: 120-124).

of meaning-transference (“I sincerely believe X to be true”) is turned into a tool of desire satisfaction by the strategic actor.

This leads Habermas to an important claim. It is not just that perlocutionary speech acts separate meaning, validity, and intention. It is that in performing this separation, they surreptitiously subvert illocutionary meaning in a manner that nonetheless remains *parasitic* upon it (*TCA*, I: 288). Perlocutionary acts *conceal* their true, manipulative design in the enabling sheep’s clothing of communicative action:

If the hearer failed to understand what the speaker was saying, a strategically acting speaker would not be able to bring the hearer ... to behave in the desired way. To this extent ... “the use of language with an orientation to consequences” is *not* an original use of language (*TCA*, I: 293).

The claim that strategic action is non-primary or parasitic is important because it lends credence to Habermas’ fundamental argument that communicative action not just *ought to be* but in fact *is* the primary form of social interaction and integration and that, consequently, reason is itself communicative.⁷ Thus, the “real,” what empirically exists, points by its very constitution towards the “ideal,” the emancipatory norms of reflexivity and reciprocity.⁸ But if reason is primarily communicative and interwoven with inescapable norms, then Weber’s action-theory is flawed in having placed a secondary relation, the subject’s instrumental relation to the world and other subjects, before a primary relation, the subject’s dependence upon interpersonal speech for both its understanding of the world and its own identity (*TCA*, I: 340-41, 391-399). This entails, in turn, that Weber’s, and subsequently Adorno and Horkheimer’s, focus on a world-mastering reason that led inexorably to the bondage of the “iron cage,” sprang from a fundamentally skewed comprehension of modernity, one blind to its integral communicative-rational dimensions (*TCA*, I: 377-386; *PDM*: 106-130). And if Weber’s pessimistic understanding of modernity has to be questioned, then there is the possibility that the communicative or intersubjective paradigm might, in isolating and deferring to the intuitive presuppositions made by participants in communicative interaction, grant a general structure to the consensual and non-dominative pursuit of universal interests.

⁷ See (*TCA*, I: 94-101, 341; *TCA*, II: 153-197), McCarthy (1984: XXVIII), and White (1988: 45, 97).

⁸ “The utopian perspective of reconciliation and freedom is ingrained in the conditions for communicative sociation of individuals; it is built into the linguistic mechanism of the reproduction of the species” (*TCA*, I: 398). See also Honneth & Joas (1988: 156) and Schnädelbach (1991: 12).

3.II.) Discourse, Morality, and the Just Society

Habermas' concern with "universal interests" is a response to Weber's politically realist excision of the claims of justice (Ch 1.II.). Together with his belief that the differentiation of cultural "value spheres" entails a new polytheism of warring "gods and demons," Weber's monological conception of the subject forces the conclusion that normative matters are essentially subjective, questions of individual decision alone. "Reason" now being the determination of means to chosen ends and not the defensibility of these ends, the distinction between *de facto* belief and *justified* belief in the legitimacy of political orders disappears. The result is a positivist understanding of law and a strategic vision of politics where what counts is success, the ability to enforce one's will and interests "despite resistance" (*ES*: 52). Politics transforming into the enforcement of one's will, there is nothing to prevent the imperatives of power erasing the obligations of solidarity and justice, since these obligations are now themselves merely instances of the will to power (*MCCA*: 72-73).

But this conclusion holds only if the primacy of communication is denied. As a "medium for permanent criticism," the bourgeois public sphere challenged that denial and, in altering the "conditions for the legitimation of political domination," opened the possibility of distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate power (*TCA*, I: 341). Under these altered conditions, it is speech, not violence, which defines "the political." Opposing the strategic to the communicative, Habermas argues that communication is pivotal not only to the formation of identities and social collectivities, but also to those moments when identities and collectivities *conflict*, where a highly specific form of interaction is called for, *moral discourse*. In "morality" (*Moralität*) Habermas sees the prime integrative force of modern societies, one having replaced the archaic bonding force of religion.⁹ Although his subjectivism reduced conflict resolution to arbitrary willing, Weber's "own arguments for the superiority of ethics of responsibility over ethics of conviction" in fact presumes an intersubjectively justifiable account of moral life (*TCA*, I: 231). This account can be provided and the universal claims of justice defended against the egocentric demands of power, Habermas argues, by explicating the notions of "morality" and "discourse."

Habermas speaks of "discourse" when contested claims and arguments impel participants in a dialogue to suppose "that a rationally motivated agreement could in principle be achieved" if "argumentation could be conducted openly enough and continued

⁹ See (*TCA*, II: 92-93; *IO*: 80). Habermas' later work ascribes this integrative force to positive law, but positive law is seen as *complementary* to morality, and morality is still, in the final instance, the filter through which all legal discourse must pass (*BFN*: 155-168).

long enough (*TCA*, I: 42). A central feature of discourse is the achievement of a hypothetical attitude relieved “of the pressures of action and experience,” so that validity claims can be divorced from their affective tie to partial commitments and treated as hypotheses, rather than givens (*TCA*, I: 25). In line with the three “institutional criteria” of the bourgeois public sphere, discourse also presumes that conditions of openness and equality operate, what Habermas calls the “ideal speech situation” (1973: 255-257; *MCCA*: 163; *JA*: 53; *IO*: 41). While never fully realizable, this ideal is both *constitutive* and *regulative* of all attempts to reach understanding in the sense that the redemption of validity claims --- this is true, that false, this is right, that wrong --- constitutes the bedrock of communication and that their perfect, non-coercive fulfilment is the standard guiding understanding.

Concerned with justice alone, “morality” equates with Kantian *self-determination* (*Selbstbestimmung*), by which Habermas means the autonomous feat of subjects collectively setting down the general rules of their co-existence. Such feats are in principle transcontextual in reaching beyond the bounds of the particular to encompass humanity as a whole (*MCCA*: 197). Filtering out the particular, this abstractive reach rests upon a reciprocal apportioning of responsibility between speakers on the assumption that all are equally rational and committed to achieving understanding. Moral disputes concern the satisfaction of needs, or, more precisely, subjects coming to a consensus (*Einverständnis*) during moments of crisis on their “need interpretations.” Only those need interpretations coinciding with the interest of all are morally valid. Directed towards “generalizable interests,” morality therefore provides a shield to human vulnerability, “the constitutional susceptibility of a personality structure that is at the mercy of interpersonal relations.”¹⁰ In a time of increasing pluralism, susceptibility calls for an “ascetic construal of morality” to provide a basis for linking everyday intuitions to the general structures of moral consciousness (*JA*: 176). Morality is ascetic insofar as the practical questions falling under its universalizing gaze are rigorously and abstractly narrowed to those general prohibitions and obligations of the form: “you ought not to kill,” “you ought to keep your promises.”

Along with abstract universality, morality has two further characteristics. It is *cognitivist* insofar as moral norms can be demonstrably vindicated by way of non-subjective reasons based on the notion of “right” in a mode analogous to the vindication of truth claims. It is *deontological* in privileging unconditional, non-conflicting *norms*, or generally binding behavioural expectations, over conflicting, optimizable and context-dependent *values*, by which Habermas understands personally chosen or culturally rooted ideals or

ends. Morality is therefore non-teleological in securing the conditions for the mutual co-existence of diverse subjects, rather than any particular vision of the good life. So understood, moral norms differ from values in four ways (*BFN*: 254-261; *IO*: 54-56). First, they presume a rule-governed sort of action irreducible to purposive action. Thus norms constrain utility calculations, which rely on preferential and contingent orderings of values. Second, they are either right or wrong, whereas values are more or less “preferable.” Norms rely on an abstract ought, values on intensity of desire. Third, norms are absolutely binding whereas values are relatively binding, conditional upon cultural conventions and subjective aspirations. Last, where values can and do conflict, norms cannot; they must constitute a coherent system, as in the case of statutes and constitutions.

Given the fact of modern pluralism, a post-conventional deontological morality must be neutral between and compatible with a variety of world-views (*IO*: 77, 93). In line with “non-comprehensiveness,” Habermas’ theory of morality --- “discourse ethics” --- adheres to a rigorously *proceduralist* approach in relying solely on the presuppositions of argumentative speech and not presuming any substantive content, which would prejudice his theory towards culturally biased or subjective conclusions. It is also proceduralist in the sense that it imagines the *actual* functioning of morality as the following of procedures. A central error of thinkers such as John Rawls is that they predetermine the outcome of moral deliberations by including lists of “primary goods” in their theoretical constructions. Precisely because content is always culturally specific, these lists cannot be a reliable basis for a general theory (*IO*: 51-56). Moreover, in determining these lists and in setting down *substantive* moral principles to govern actual relationships or social distributions, Rawls and thinkers like him assume the role of philosopher-kings and illegitimately usurp the autonomy of ordinary citizens (*MCCA*: 66-67). The principle that Habermas wishes to locate, the principle of universalizability (U), functions merely as a *rule of argumentation* drawn from the necessary performative presuppositions of discourse. Thoroughly dialogic in its actual execution, “discourse ethics” is a thoroughly “minimal ethic” that leaves the decision to endorse specific substantive principles, such as Rawls’ “difference principle,” to actual participants in real discourses.¹¹ Hence Habermas’ denial that he is offering a blueprint or model to which society must conform. His task is simply to locate the procedures that citizens must follow in their quest for a just and rational society.

¹⁰ (*JA*: 67; *BR*: 73). On generalizable interests, see also McCarthy (1992: 51-72), White (1988: 69-74, 85-89), and Outhwaite (1994: 110-111).

¹¹ (*CES*: 90; *JA*: 16; *IO*: 72-73). See also Pettit (1982), Moon (1995), and Campbell (2000: 244).

Habermas' justification of these procedures is complex, but his central argument is that the core principle of discourse ethics (D) --- "only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse" --- stands justified if it can be demonstrated that this principle implies universalizability (U), which, in turn, is premised on the structure of discursive argumentation in general (*MCCA*: 66). (U) states that a norm is valid if and only if "*all* affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its *general* observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of *everyone's* interests" (*MCCA*: 65). Thus, only those desires, goods, and principles that "survive" this generalization test merit the status of morality. The principle of universalization (U) can be defended against Weber's metaethical scepticism by explicating the presuppositions or minimal "informal logic" underlying all argumentation (*MCCA*: 57-63). Against the sceptic's contention that this minimal logic must either fall into an infinite regress or circularity, Habermas argues that the presuppositions of an activity required to make that activity meaningful are not a question of *semantic* relation or formal logic but of the informal-logical *performative* prerequisites of that activity's coming into being, its meaning.¹² Consequently, Habermas' task is not to show that coming to an understanding actually *entails* such presuppositions, but instead that there is *no* alternative to them, that as far as we can tell we must presume them in order to be able to argue or come to an understanding at all.

To show the lack of alternatives, Habermas (*MCCA*: 86-90) claims there are three main levels of argumentative presupposition corresponding roughly to what Aristotle meant by "logic," the products of speech, "dialectic," the procedures of speaking, and "rhetoric," the processes engaged in by speakers. While the second category of presupposition, dialectic, does in fact have normative import, it is in the third category of process rules that Habermas sees the key to grounding (U) and (D.) These rules embody the "ideal speech situation" in excluding all forms of internal or external coercion and demanding a *general symmetry of condition* hostile to pre-given claims to authority. Thus:

- 3.1 Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.
- 3.2 a. Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.
- b. Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.
- c. Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires, and needs.

¹² If a presupposition cannot be challenged without performative self-contradiction "then it belongs to those transcendental-pragmatic presuppositions of argumentation that one must always (already) have accepted, if the language game of argumentation is to be meaningful" (*MCCA*: 81-82).

- 3.3 No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in 3.1 and 3.2 (*MCCA*: 89).

The first rule defines the set of potential participants, the second guarantees participants equal opportunity to contribute to ongoing arguments, and the third prohibits all forms of coercion other than the “unforced force of the better argument.”

To show, however, that we are dealing here with inescapable presuppositions and not mere social conventions, Habermas must rely, finally, on the idea of *performative contradictions*. When a subject engages in an activity but denies the central presuppositions of that activity --- that dialogue requires speech, for instance --- he contradicts himself performatively and thus invalidates his position as a serious or sane participant. Habermas (*MCCA*: 89-91) illuminates the idea of performative contradiction by analyzing the verbs *to convince* and *to talk into*. By definition, “to convince” is internally connected with the reaching of a reasoned agreement, whereas “talking somebody into something” implies subterfuge, manipulation, threats or the offering of rewards. To say, then, that by threatening a person one managed to convince him of the strength of one’s argument is to speak in non-sensical terms, that is, to commit a performative contradiction. If we cannot commit such errors and still claim to be seriously engaged in argumentation, then we must assume rules 3.1 to 3.3. But if this is so, then all serious participants who seek mutual understanding and who realise that strategic action is in the end parasitic upon communicative relations must therefore presume (U) and its assertion that only norms which can claim the free consent of all participants in a discursive search for general interests are ultimately valid. With (U) justified in this manner, Habermas assumes the cogency of (D) and his project as a whole, that the “moral point of view” is not something we can either adopt or reject “at will,” but a perspective which “forces itself intuitively on anyone who is at all open to ... reflective communicative action” (*JA*: 1).

Weberian subjectivism therefore hinges upon a failure to take the intuitive pre-conditions of argumentation seriously. There are two further reasons for this failure, however. The first is Weber’s assumption that the cultural “value spheres” or “rationality complexes” of science, morality-law, and art are bound to conflict, condemning actors to an arbitrary choice between irreconcilable demands. Habermas rejects this as unfounded hyperbole, arguing instead that in its role as a “mediating interpreter” philosophy can interrelate the discrete claims of scientific truth, moral rightness, and aesthetic authenticity so that a balanced, rather than one-sided, everyday life can be lived (*TCA*, I: 249; *TCA*, II: 397-398; *MCCA*: 19). The second, more fundamental, reason for Weber’s decisionism is

his conflation of *moral norms* with *ethical values*.¹³ Thus, in developing his discourse ethics, or, more appropriately, “discourse morality,” Habermas also has a contrasting, subordinate mode of linguistic interaction in mind.¹⁴ Directing itself “negatively to the damaged life instead of pointing affirmatively to the good life,” morality concerns questions of “right” which encompass the interests of *all*, whereas ethics (*das Ethische*) points to what is good for *me* or for *us* given our context and the uniqueness of our historical identity-formation (*MCCA*: 205). The ethical therefore refers to the spectrum of *evaluative* questions having to do with the meaningfulness of human life, the ends chosen or virtues deemed admirable by individuals and groups, their *ethoi*, and the historically-effected nature of personal and communal existence. Pertaining to questions of the “good,” it is a massive category that includes all the things implied by Hegel’s idea of “ethical life” (*Sittlichkeit*) and Aristotle’s notion of *eudaimonia*, “well being” or “flourishing.”

To show why subjectivism results from the confusion of moral norms with ethical values, Habermas (*TCA*, I: 20-21) contrasts discursive argumentation with “aesthetic criticism” and “therapeutic critique,” both aspects of the “ethical-existential” rationality complex. At stake in ethics is the idea of *self-realization* (*Selbstverwirklichung*) or the self’s capacity to work out for itself conceptions of the good and to combine these goods into a relatively coherent narrative or whole. Of prime significance here is the notion of “identity,” of personal and communal historical teleologies and the understandings attaching to them. Harnessing the disclosive power of art to convey exemplary experiences, aesthetic criticism evaluates the *adequacy* or *authenticity* of values as they relate to individual and communal ways of life. The object is the self-understanding or “hermeneutic evaluation” of specific lives grounded in the preunderstandings of an everyday lifeworld that can never attain the decontextualised, depersonalised transparency associated with theoretical or moral-practical argument.¹⁵ Although reflective, aesthetic criticism is nonetheless limited. Privileging concrete value systems, neo-Hegelian and neo-Aristotelian communitarianisms therefore run up against the ineluctable fact that there is just no way of singling out *the* good life from the multiplicity of contextual goods demanding allegiance. Similar limitations constrain therapeutic critique. Therapy explores self-deception in the claims to sincerity and truthfulness actors make in reflecting upon who they are or want to be. Self-deceptions

¹³ Weber “did not distinguish the preferences for values which, within the limits of specific life forms and traditions, commend themselves, so to speak, as superior to other values, ... from the moral oughtness of norms that obligate equally all whom they address” (Habermas, 1988a: 227).

¹⁴ Habermas (*JA*: vii) writes that it is more accurate to speak of “discourse morality,” but continues to use “discourse ethics” on account of its established usage

cannot be demonstrated by argument; they can simply be *shown* “by the lack of consistency between an utterance and the past or future actions internally connected with it” (*TCA*, I: 41). Directed to historical *conventions* and inner *subjectivity* respectively, criticism and therapeutic critique are more matters of historical chance and inner will than impartial practical reason and are thus rationally subordinate to morality.

Weber, then, correctly saw in ethics an ineliminable conventional and subjective element, but unwittingly concluded with subjectivism in mistaking the ethical for the moral. Habermas stands by this contention in later writings, even though his understanding of morality and ethics has undergone considerable revision.¹⁶ In place of a simple moral-ethical dualism, he now differentiates practical reason into three distinct moments or discourses, the pragmatic-purposive, the ethical, *and* the moral (*JA*: 1-17; *BFN*: 104-111). Political discourse has a variety of contents ranging from pragmatic questions regarding the most efficient means to predetermined ends, to ethical questions of ecology, immigration policy, the protection of ethnic-cultural minorities, political culture, and the strictly moral questions of wealth distribution, taxation, educational and health care provisions, equal opportunities, and the system of private and public rights (*BFN*: 165, 513-514). This expansion of the notion of discourse explains why Habermas (*BFN*: 155) also proceeds to draw a distinction between the moral principle (U), which concerns rightness alone, and the discourse principle (D), which is no longer equated with morality but includes the whole gamut of forms of argumentation, types of reason, and which centres around the institutional, rather than interpersonal, procedures of interaction. Moral discourse is therefore one moment in a much larger network of arguments and reasons that has to *cohere* with self-legislated moral norms but not necessarily stem from them.

Now bearing the title “discourse,” ethical-political discussion assumes a legitimate role in legislative processes. Indeed, Habermas (*BFN*: 130-131, 359-359) increasingly stresses the interlocking co-originality of self-determination and self-realization and, far more significantly, the dependence of moral-political consciousness on an ethical-political culture that “meets it halfway,” that is, a historically embedded, culturally specific understanding of ourselves that stresses the role of universal rights in the generation of our particular group identities. Where in his earlier writings the ethical suffered trivialization so as to counter

¹⁵ No one can “agree to the form of life in which he has been socialized in the same way as he can to a norm of whose validity he has convinced himself” (*TCA*, II: 109). See Cooke (1999a: 196).

¹⁶ Developed in *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (1979), *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987), and *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1990), Habermas’ “discourse ethics” underwent revision in *Justification and Application* (1993) and *Between Facts and Norms* (1996). See Cooke (1999a; 1999b) and Ferrara (1999).

Weberian value-scepticism and the presumed conservatism of neo-Hegelian and neo-Aristotelian theories, his current goal is to offer a sort of rapprochement that, nonetheless, refuses to surrender the strict universalism of moral normativity (*JA*: 91-92). This explains why, as we will see (Ch 4.II.ii), he also begins to speak of two moral principles, of decontextualized *justification* and of *interpretive application*, the principle of “appropriateness.” This turn is accompanied, as well, by an attempt to stipulate processes of “fair bargaining” for conflicts that do not entail generalizable interests or that arise in situations where such interests cannot be agreed on. For Habermas (*BFN*: 166) strategic bargaining aims not at consensus but rather at *compromise*, the acceptance of a course of action by actors for “*different*” as opposed to “identical” or shared reasons. Attempting to accommodate aspects of liberal pluralism, he now declares that compromise-formation has a legitimate place within political orders, but with the stern proviso that it be bound to elementary rules secured *indirectly* by moral discourses attuned to the inequities of social power.¹⁷

Yet despite increasing sophistication, Habermas steadfastly holds to the primacy of morality over ethics, of right over good. Even if the ethical-existential now bears the label “discourse,” his position has not fundamentally changed: ethics has to do with self-understanding, self-clarification, and the meanings and ends around which individuals and groups mould themselves, not unconditional, universally binding obligations. Thus, it plays second fiddle to discourse proper, being non-demonstrable, lacking procedural transparency, and tied to the heteronomous “egoistic” perspectives of *me* or *us* (*JA*: 6; *BFN*: 97; *IO*: 216). Where the “good” relies on an opaque plurality of substantive rationalities and pregiven forms of life, justice draws from the certain, indubitable form of a moral validity stripped of metaphysical trappings. Philosophers who wish to elucidate general theories of human flourishing suffer unrelenting admonishment for promoting comprehensive visions of the good life that in a postmetaphysical age ought to be left to the judgement of ordinary citizens. A deontological, minimal moral theory is all that philosophy can provide and it alone yields an impartial route beyond utilitarian value-optimization, communitarian conventionalism, and Weber’s subjective “gods and demons.”

¹⁷ Morality dictates that a compromise be “(a) more advantageous to all than no arrangement whatever, (b) exclude free riders who withdraw from cooperation, and (c) exclude exploited parties who contribute more to the cooperative effort than they gain from it” (*BFN*: 166).

3.III.) Systemic Integration and the Loss of Freedom and Meaning

The turn to intersubjectivity and the discourse theory of morality are sufficient to rebuff Weber's subjectivism and pessimistic narrative of Western rationalization, but they do not simply invalidate his diagnosis of the modern age. In Habermas' view Weber's diagnosis still commands respect insofar as "mechanized petrification" and "disenchantment" refer to real losses in freedom and meaning in advanced modernity. These losses are the result not of rationalization *per se*, but a pathologically imbalanced rationalization in which the principle of lifeworld or symbolic reproduction, communication, is suppressed by a competing principle governing the "material reproduction" of societies, *systemic integration*. Although the social integrative mechanism of communicative solidarity defines the lifeworld horizons of the family, civil society, and the public sphere, accompanying it are the mechanisms of *money* and *power*, which impel the "subsystems" of the market and state (*TCA*, II: 310). Hence Habermas' turn towards the systems theories or *macro-sociological functionalism* of Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann. Despite his longstanding criticisms of systems theories, he sees in them an important parallel to Marx's excavation of the economic "base" wherein processes of commodification were said to work "behind the backs" of actors.¹⁸ Because Weber failed to develop anything like Marx's "base-superstructure" model, he rashly identified lifeworld rationalization with the processes of material or systemic modernization, which had the disastrous effect of conceptually emasculating the normative content of modernity (*TCA*, II: 333). To avoid this, Habermas (*PDM*: 365) develops a "two-level" theory of society which locates the crises of modernity in a "border conflict" (*Grenzkonflikt*) between lifeworld and system that has become increasingly desperate with the arrival of advanced capitalism.

Habermas grounds his "two-level" theory in an initially analytic distinction between two methodological perspectives or standpoints. As "*systematically stabilized* complexes of action of *socially integrated* groups," societies can be looked upon either from the *internal* lifeworld perspective of actors --- action-theoretically in terms of conscious communicative and purposive acts ---- or from the *external* perspective of observers --- systems-theoretically in terms of latent processes and functional consequences (*TCA*, II: 152; 1991a: 253). Because every social phenomenon exhibits a dual aspect, action-theoretic approaches and systems-theoretic approaches are insufficient in themselves. It is only by combining them

¹⁸ (*TCA*, II: 186; *PDM*: 349). For his criticisms of macro-sociological functionalism, see Habermas (1988b [1970]: 74-88), Luhmann & Habermas (1971: 142-290), and McCarthy (1978: 213-232).

into an overall theory, Habermas argues, that the social theorist can come to a full grasp of social reality and thereby open up the possibility of emancipatory critique.

Habermas thinks action-theoretic approaches insufficient insofar as they rely on “three fictions”: the belief that actors are fully autonomous; that culture is independent from external material constraints; and that communication is always transparent, devoid of “systematic distortion” (*TCA*, II: 148-152). This concentration on unproblematized *action orientations* ignores the processes by which unintended *action consequences* --- the purchase of a commodity in one context buttressing economic exploitation elsewhere, for example--- are coordinated and stabilized by steering mechanisms such as money in a mode inaccessible to ordinary perception.¹⁹ From the observer perspective of action consequences what is significant is not mutual understanding or conscious perlocutionary acts, but a latent “functionalist rationality.” By “functionalist rationality” Habermas understands an underlying structural logic that compels subjects to unconsciously adopt an objectivating, purposive attitude.²⁰ Systems theory reinterprets “reason” as the ability of macro-sociological systems, such as the market, to successfully adapt to and “maintain themselves vis-à-vis an unstable and hypercomplex environment” (*TCA*, II: 151). Its criterion, therefore, is not communication but the intensifying *complexity* of a radically depersonalized strategic rationality “accessible only to the counterintuitive knowledge of the social sciences developing since the eighteenth century” (*TCA*, II: 173, 180). Yet Habermas also make clear that systemic approaches are in themselves blind, unable to ascertain the phenomena or realities requiring explanation. Because the lifeworld experiences of labour, commodity exchange, and officialdom *initially* determine the subject matter of the observer perspective, a viable “two-level” theory has to commence with the everyday perceptions of ordinary subjects (*TCA*, II: 151-154). Subsequent moves to an observer perspective are justified, Habermas contends, by actors’ experiences of “objectification” or alienation from their social reality.

Concerned with objectification and alienation, Habermas clearly does not conceive of the lifeworld-system distinction in methodological or analytic terms alone. Indeed, the point of his incorporation of systems theory is to illuminate how realms of “norm-free sociality” *actually* broke free from lifeworld contexts (*TCA*, II: 172, 258; *PDM*: 349). The distinction is therefore intended in an “essentialist sense” as referring to how the lifeworld suffered

¹⁹ Actions are “coordinated not only through processes of reaching understanding, but also through functional interconnections that are not intended by them and are usually not even perceived within the horizon of everyday practice” (*TCA*, II: 150).

²⁰ “Insofar as actions are coordinated through a delinguistified medium such as money, normatively embedded interactions are turned into success-oriented transactions” (*TCA*, II: 178; 1991a: 254).

reduction to the status of a mere environment or appendage to the economy and state (1991a: 256). As Habermas puts it, “the social”:

split up into spheres of action constituted as the lifeworld and spheres neutralized against the lifeworld. The former are communicatively structured, the latter formally organized ... [standing] *opposite* one another as socially and systemically integrated spheres of action (*TCA*, II: 309).

Under this view, the modern world is the result of a world-historical “uncoupling” in which lifeworld and systemic imperatives have become progressively estranged. In tribal societies the kinship structure meant that power and exchange relations stood under the normative aegis of religion and family, lifeworld and system being virtually one (*TCA*, II: 154). This unity of the symbolic and systemic disintegrated with the movement of economic production from the household, into the guilds, and then into functionally autonomous markets, and the transformation of organizational power structures from tribal descent hierarchies, into the feudal estate system, and then into a state-centred power structure mediated by a codified system of law and offices. The end-result is an economy and administrative state that adhere to unique logics wherein moral-normative dispositions and identity-supportive social relations have become largely irrelevant.²¹ But while the impetus to growing complexity came from changes in the environmental, material, demographic, and class composition of society, Habermas insists that system rationalization depended on a prior rationalization of the lifeworld. Only if the lifeworld had previously attained a degree of structural differentiation, in the sense of a decentring of the symbolic processes of cultural reproduction, social integration, and identity formation, could advances also be made in the sphere of material reproduction, since these advances required an enhancement of knowledge and a release from traditionalism (*TCA*, II: 148, 173). The irony, however, is that the enabling increase in lifeworld learning capacities facilitated a secondary strand of rationalization which would later become independent of and enter into competition with the rationalized lifeworld (*TCA*, II: 342-343).

The threshold for the decisive break between lifeworld and system was, as Marx and Weber saw, early modern capitalism. With capitalism’s intensified division of labour, there arose the need to coordinate the actions of spatially and temporally distanced individuals (*TCA*, II: 160). The “delinguistified” steering media of money and administrative power therefore assumed the function of self-programming codes circulating within and between discrete “subsystems of purposive rational action” (*TCA*, II: 180-181). Here law played a

²¹ “Norm-conformative attitudes and identity-forming social memberships are neither necessary nor possible in these spheres; they are made peripheral instead” (*TCA*, II: 154.)

paramount and highly ambivalent role. Habermas understands modern formal law dualistically as both a *lifeworld institution* in which post-conventional moral consciousness finds embodiment in a system of private and public rights, and as a *systemic medium* which grounds, codifies and thereby stabilizes the circuit of money and administrative power. Channelling lifeworld and systemic imperatives into one another, law enabled the appearance of subsystems by “anchoring” them in lifeworld contexts in the form of corporations, bureaucratic organizations, welfare agencies, and so forth (*TCA*, II: 173, 364-366). These autonomous “formally organized realms” then perpetuated themselves internally by legally determining the conditions of organizational membership so that engagement in consensual, communicative forms of action coordination was displaced in favour of normalizing routines. Communication and “informal” association still endure within such organizations, but they are “disempowered” in the sense that presuppositional validity claims have been decisively bracketed out. Hence the pertinence of Weber’s “model of bureaucracy,” despite its reductive portrayal of managerial authority (*TCA*, II: 310).

Marx erred, asserts Habermas (*TCA*, II: 339; 1991b: 34, 40-41), in thinking this evolutionary uncoupling detrimental. System is not in itself destructive. Because lifeworld rationalization increases the demand on communicative energies, “subsystemic relief mechanisms” helps ease the swelling risk of cognitive and motivational dissensus.²² This ameliorating function is paralleled, as well, by an enormous expansion in productivity and material well-being. Thus, far from alleviating the maladies of the present, a de-differentiating rejection of systemic complexity, a return to the enchanted and simple, would mean both a repressive embrace of metaphysical totalities and social chaos (Habermas, 1986: 107). Against romantic idealizations of the past, Habermas argues that systemic imperatives only become destructive when they reach in and transform the irreplaceable reproductive mechanisms of the lifeworld. This occurs when systemic crises or “disequilibria,” such as class conflict or recession, are “successfully intercepted by having recourse to lifeworld resources,” that is, by re-defining lifeworld structures so as to reduce the likelihood of material or organizational instability (*TCA*, II: 385-386). This “colonization” or “mediatization” has drastic effect because cultural and intersubjective meaning can “neither be bought nor coerced” (1991a: 259; 1992c: 473). By analogy to Marx’s theory of value, Habermas (*TCA*, II: 334-338) argues that when symbolic needs and lifeworld roles are translated into systemic imperatives, communal and individual life suffer “abstraction” and

²² “To satisfy this growing need for coordination, there is either explicit communication or relief mechanisms that reduce the expenditure of communication and the risk of disagreement” (*TCA*, II: 181; *TCA*, I: 340-342).

cease to be the result of communication or intersubjective will. Increasing their areas of competency and control, the market and state therefore loom over the lifeworld as a “quasi-natural force” beyond the power of subjects to change or resist (*TCA*, II: 375).

Drawing from Weber’s metaphor of the “iron cage,” Habermas understands this colonizing force as a “systemically induced reification” or “loss of freedom” impelled by “commodification” and “juridification” (*TCA*, II: 306-331). Private life becomes commodified when the market transforms *individuals* with unique personalities into *consumers* with standardized material, leisure, and erotic preferences tailored to the pre-structured dimensions of capitalist production and consumption. Individuals have choices, yet far from being autonomous these choices are made “under system conditions that are not under his control” (1992a: 195-196). The end-result is a “life-style” geared not to personal maturity, familial intimacy or cooperative solidarity but to a “possessive individualism ... freed from the pressures of [communicative] rationality” (*TCA*, II: 325). Commodification is paralleled by processes of “juridification” when previously extraneous lifeworld domains are legally incorporated into the administrative state. With the expansion of formal positive law there is a “bureaucratic disempowering and desiccation of spontaneous process of opinion- and will-formation,” resulting in the transformation of *citizens* into *clients* (*TCA*, II: 325, 357). Habermas has in mind here the workings of contemporary mass “welfare-states.” Dilemmatically caught between the imperatives of the market economy and normative egalitarian ideals, the welfare-state attempts to defuse class-struggle by providing newly redefined clients material and service compensations (*CES*: 194-198). This leads to a vast increase in therapeutic social services and judicial interventions into private life. The goal of these services and interventions is to relieve disadvantage and suffering, but they do so at the cost of client dependency and surveillance.²³ Thus, although an incontrovertible advance on previous state forms, the “welfare-state compromise” has the effect of easing systemic disequilibria by intensifying lifeworld crises.

These crises take the form of *pathologies* that affect the lifeworld components of cultural reproduction, social integration, and identity-formation in different ways (*TCA*, II: 143, 305). In a complex argument, Habermas contends that by lessening the likelihood of *anomie*, “delegitimation” and “withdrawal of motivation,” that is, pathologies associated with social integration and most likely to topple political systems, welfare compensations increase the likelihood of pathologies in cultural reproduction and personality formation

²³ “The more the welfare state ... spreads a net of client relationships over private spheres of life, the stronger are the anticipated pathological side effects of a juridification that entails both a bureaucratization and a monetarization of core areas of the lifeworld” (*TCA*, II: 364).

(*TCA*, II: 385-386). As the impetus to political change or revolution becomes increasingly enervated, personal identities and communal inheritances become increasingly threatened by the intrusions of courts and therapeutic agencies into the lifeworld realms of the school and family. The result is a disruption of familial bonds, inhibited ambition, growing irresponsibility, and a weakening of individual self-esteem and communal self-reliance (*TCA*, II: 362-369).

Lifeworld pathologies are also a consequence of what Habermas, following Weber's vision of arid specialists and idle sensualists, terms the "*loss of meaning*." This loss has two sources. One is the enforced specialization or division of labour generated by the market and state's accentuation of the cognitive-instrumental rationality complex. This accentuation elicits as its reverse image an aestheticizing or sensualist counter-movement in the form of New Age and equivalent groups, which, because they adhere to metaphysical and mystical modes of thought, cannot cope with modern realities and instead urge a futile return to the past (*PDM*: 340). However, the more fundamental cause of modern meaninglessness is a "cultural impoverishment" induced *not* by systemic colonization but by the rise of expert cultures that monopolize the various spheres of science, morality-law, and art that were differentiated out in the process of lifeworld rationalization.²⁴ Everyday practice becomes desiccated as the validity claims of truth, right and good are appropriated by elites who thereby contribute to the destruction of "vital traditions" already weakened by systemic reification. Instead of "false consciousness," of a totalizing ideology cloaking the injustices of the present, the danger ordinary subjects now face is "fragmented consciousness," an inability to reflectively "synthesize" current predicaments and to interrelate the various roles and aspects of their lives (*TCA*, II: 353-356). Lacking the ability to articulate dissatisfaction, citizens are both intellectually and politically disempowered.

For Habermas commodification, juridification, and cultural impoverishment together explain the "structural transformation" of the bourgeois public sphere and the consequent suppression of modernity's emancipatory potential. As the bourgeois public sphere opened up to the "unpropertied masses" it became interwoven with the administrative state and economy and thereby lost "its political function ... of subjecting the affairs that it had made public to the control of a critical public" (*STPS*: 140, 177). This critical "culture-debating" function gave way to an ethos of culture consumption directed not towards universality, truth and rational agreement but an engineered consensus congruent with the imperatives of money and administrative power (*STPS*: 159). The result is a "refeudalization" of civil

society where, in the manner of the old monarchs, special interest groups and political parties seek “to manipulate public opinion without themselves being controlled by it” (*STPS*: 200). The ideals of autonomy and solidarity are still touted, but they are less reflections of a shared, general interest than ideological catchwords for the staged legitimization of corporate and governmental programs.

The targets of Habermas’ “refeudalization” thesis are clear. On the one hand, he fears the triumph of “systematically distorted communication” wherein the potentialities of mutual understanding suffocate under the weight of creeping formalization. This gives rise to forms of “structural violence” that without becoming manifest preprogramme modes of thought, inducing subjects to think of themselves and their lifeworld in terms amenable to the maintenance of markets and administrative control.²⁵ On the other hand, he isolates the phenomenon of “cultural impoverishment” as a key reason why the emancipatory “contents of cultural modernity have been defused” (*TCA*, II: 328). Structural violence and consciousness fragmentation are mutually supportive in the sense that the latter renders the former invisible to everyday perception. When structural violence, the numbing bonds of systemic logics, does appear it assumes the image of a “causality of fate,” of an “external” or “second nature” impervious to human agency (*TCA*, II: 155, 311; *PDM*: 353). This fate appears paradoxical inasmuch as it was lifeworld rationalization that made possible the very systemic complexity and expert cultures now sapping its utopian energies.

²⁴ “What accrues to a culture by virtue of specialized work and reflection does not come *as a matter of course* into the possession of everyday practice” (*TCA*, II: 326; *STPS*: 174-175).

²⁵ Such violence “does not manifest itself *as force*,” but, unnoticed, blocks “those communications in which convictions effective for legitimization are formed” (1977: 21; *TCA*, II: 187).

3.IV.) Civil Society, Radical Reformism, and Deliberative Democracy

Weber's response to this apparent paradox is a "heroic nihilism" resigned to "mechanized petrification" (*TCA*, II: 324; *PNC*: 140). Bureaucratization being irreversible, the final chance for "individually differentiated conduct" lies in the domination of purpose-rational administrative machines by charismatic personalities (*ES*: 1156). The only agents capable of bearing a principled and yet political *wertrational* "cause," *Reichspräsidenten* and party bosses have no alternative but to engage in a plebiscitary democracy where what counts is the manipulation of mass emotions, the binding of passive electorates to the image of the leader (*TCA*, I: 352, 447; *STPS*: 203). Politics is necessarily dominative, the achievement of goals through direct and indirect violence.

Habermas spurns Weber's "heroic nihilism," thinking it less a check on than a perpetuation of reification and refeudalization. Because "enlightenment can only make good its deficits by radicalized enlightenment," he (*PDM*: 84) doggedly insists that a rejuvenating, albeit circumscribed and modest, realignment of society towards a genuine politics of communication and consensus might still yet be achieved though the associations of civil society and a critical public sphere. The public sphere suffered an internal transformation, but as an ideal and reality it retains the resources to counter that deformation and to hold back system.²⁶ One prime manifestation of civil society's emancipatory potential, for Habermas, is the grassroots, informally constituted "new social movements" that took hold from the 1960s onward. These movements stand below the threshold of formal organization and are therefore intimately linked to the "capacity for reflection" exhibited by individual members (*TCA*, II: 390-395; *NC*: 64-67). Because formal organization means surrender to systemic imperatives and self-obliteration, these informal associations resist transforming into parties or lobby groups.²⁷ As feminism, green politics, and the various peace movements attest, their potential inheres in a form of *protest* that simultaneously reflects and effects the changing order of political priorities defining the advanced capitalist era. Where previously, in the age of class struggle, issues of material reproduction and wealth distribution formed the main lines of conflict, now protest revolves around "defending and restoring endangered ways of life," that is, questions of identity and of freedom (*TCA*, II: 392; *PDM*: 357-362; 1991b: 41). This turn from a material to a

²⁶ Habermas (1992b: 429-430, 437-438) has gradually toned down his "refeudalization" thesis, arguing that "colonization" is less pervasive than he once thought and that because the public sphere is based on "universalistic ... self-referential premises" it possesses the means to resist reification.

symbolic politics, from a politics of workers and employers to a politics of equal rights, self-determination, and quality of life, has two significant implications.

First, and pivotally, the old utopian vision inhering in the ideal of a “labouring society” no longer has force. This Marxist and pre-Marxist vision no longer applies insofar as labour, as a self-creative activity, has irretrievably succumbed to system, the one attempt at reversing this trend having ended in the disaster of state socialism.²⁷ Communication, instead, replaces labour as the utopian rallying cry to protect the universal structures and “aspects of an undamaged intersubjectivity” (*NC*: 69). Second, an emancipatory politics must be both critical *and* self-limiting. Consequent upon “uncoupling,” a politics trying to render systemic imperatives less destructive of lifeworld infrastructures must nevertheless respect the logics of state administration and the economy. Rather than “conquering” system, which they have no hope of controlling, the goal of protest movements is to *indirectly* “curb” or guide it toward an “equilibrium” between the integrative forces of solidarity, money, and administrative power (*PDM*: 365). Undemocratizable “from within,” the market and administrative state can be held in check solely by a “radical reformist” approach aimed at erecting “a democratic dam against ... colonizing encroachment” (1991b: 42; 1992b: 444). Relieved of the tasks of material reproduction, lifeworld-defensive struggles take the form of altering attitudes through open discussion, demonstration, and non-violent disobedience so as to provoke a general withdrawal of support from economic and administrative policies. Only by “besieging” system in this way, by indirectly thwarting its advance, can the public sphere register the legitimate and authentic claims and needs of civil society (*PDM*: 364; *NC*: 64-69; 1992b: 452).

First articulated in the 1980s, this “siege model” is modified in Habermas’ later work, in particular *Between Facts and Norms* (1992). There Habermas extends his arguments regarding post-conventional moral consciousness, legitimacy, and discursive procedures into a full-blown theory of democracy premised on the workings of the modern constitutional state. This turn entails a significant accommodation to the present, insofar as existing states are no longer seen as wholly systemic or automatically reifying. In providing a reconstruction of the liberal constitutional state, Habermas aims to disrupt Weber’s elitist conception of democratic rule. Identifying legality as a prime integrative force of modern societies, he (*BR*: 154; *BFN*: 354) revises his view of law as necessarily juridifying, arguing

²⁷ When informal groupings organize formally, they pay for the “gain in complexity by having organizational goals detached from the orientations and attitudes of their members” (*PDM*: 364).

²⁸ “Weber’s prognosis has proven correct: the abolition of private capitalism would not at all mean the destruction of the iron cage of modern industrial labour” (*TCA*, II: 340; 1991b: 38).

now that law stands *between* lifeworld and system in the mode of a “transformer” converting ordinary language into systemic codes and vice versa.²⁹ Functionally indispensable and therefore requiring no answer to the question “why be lawful?,” law grants and enforces extensive private rights to act strategically, but this granting and coercive enforcement are *internally* linked to normative reasons arising out of communication itself (*PNC*: 122). This seemingly “paradoxical achievement,” the intertwining of coercive law with normative reason, rests on the key claim that legitimate law issues solely from citizens *themselves*, from their discursive co-determination of behavioural expectations (*BFN*: 462).

From this claim Habermas attempts a number of reconciliations. In the guise of legally enforceable human rights, law and morality are seen as twins, the stability of law rendering moral injunctions efficacious and no longer solely reliant on individual motivations (*PNC*: 118). But as with law and morality, so too with law and democracy, which likewise stand locked in a symbiotic embrace. Here Habermas strikes at the heart of Weber’s division between passive and active subjects. Private and public autonomy, human rights and popular sovereignty, are not opposed, as liberals and civic republicans wrongly suggest, but in fact conceptually *co-original* and mutually implicated.³⁰ Nestling on the discourse principle, which is now understood as the “democratic principle,” the “democratic process bears the entire burden of [law’s] legitimation” insofar as “individual private rights cannot even be adequately formulated, let alone politically implemented, if those affected have not first engaged in public discussions,” which entails, in short, that private rights require popular sovereignty and that sovereignty, the public right to participation, necessitates private liberties (*BFN*: 450; *IO*: 207-208). This mutual presupposition rests on the socio-psychological truth that the formation of individual identities is itself a process of “socialization,” of becoming a member of a community (*PNC*: 126). The intersubjective and the personal are psychologically and politically inseparable.

The modern constitutional state therefore presumes private and public freedom in equal measure. Conflating administration and image manipulation with democratic rule, Weber reduced the state to an instrumental apparatus or means and suppressed the core normative presuppositions of modern politics. Recuperating these presuppositions, Habermas can reconstruct the “system of rights” upon which constitutional democracies must depend, the

²⁹ This is not a radical change, since he had earlier understood law as both a lifeworld institution *and* a systemic medium. See Deflem (1996), Dryzek (2000: 20-27), and Ferrara (1999: 50-60).

³⁰ This “co-originality” thesis is a late development, but it goes back to Habermas’ earliest writings, where he (*STPS* [1962]: 178) postulated a link between “the undisturbed autonomy of society as a private sphere” and “public discussion ... in the general interest.”

most important being the right to equal liberty, the right to membership in a legal community, the right to due process, the right to political participation, and the right to material and educative resources necessary for exercising one's basic rights (BFN: 118-131). This concern with constitutional rights lends Habermas' "radical reformism" a decidedly liberal cast. However, he continues to think himself "socialist" in holding to a *proceduralized* "radical democracy."³¹ With the "decentring" of society, popular sovereignty itself undergoes a transference from enclosed spaces such as parliament to the diffuse networks of autonomous and amorphous public spheres wherein the sovereign subject "disappears in ... subjectless forms of communication" (1996c: 29). Retreating into intersubjective forms of argumentation, radical democracy is reconceived in terms of interactive deliberative procedures that run parallel to, but do not subdue, the routines of delinguistified subsystems.³² In this way the legitimacy of political orders derives more from the publicity and accessibility of deliberative processes than from the realization of private interests or actual participation in government. Deliberative democracy therefore offers a third way between the classic liberal reduction of politics to strategic action hemmed in by inviolable private rights and the "naïve" republican equation of politics with a collective "macro-subject" or citizenry ordaining at will the shape of society in a process of ethical self-clarification (BFN: 296-302).

To flesh out his third way, Habermas arrives at a "two-track model." This model breaks with the siege metaphor, where lifeworld fights a rearguard action against system, by forwarding an interplay between *weak* and *strong* publics that pressures the administrative system to acknowledge lifeworld imperatives and even "determines" its direction (BFN: 304-308, 187). As with his view of "new social movements," Habermas understands as "weak" those plural and polycentric unorganized public spheres wherein problems are identified and opinions generated in a discursive contest over need interpretations. Constituting the "public sphere" proper, these informal spheres enjoy unrestricted communicative interaction insofar as they are relieved from the burden of making decisions. "Wild," "anarchic," shifting and virtual "placeless places," they represent *contexts of discovery* and *opinion-formation* embedded within and overlaying civil society, which in turn draws on modes of private interaction, the family and home (BFN: 186, 307-308). Civil society is here understood not as Hegel and Marx understood it, as a "system of needs"

³¹ "Socialism" endures if the "structures of mutual recognition ... can be transferred to the sphere of legally and administratively mediated social relations through the communicative preconditions of non-exclusive processes for the formation of public opinion" (1991b: 42).

³² A deliberative politics depends "not on a collectively acting citizenry but on the institutionalization of the corresponding procedures and conditions of communication" (1996c: 27).

inseparable from the economy, but as the non-economic and non-administrative life of more or less “spontaneous” associations that spring from face-to-face lifeworld interactions (BFN: 366-367; 1996c: 28).

Free to thematize all issues and to question arbitrary limits on public discourse --- the exclusion of domestic abuse from political discussion, for instance --- weak publics “can assume a surprisingly active and momentous role” (BFN: 312-314, 380). They assume this role in crisis moments by transmitting opinions to the formal and organized “strong” sphere of parliament, which, as a *context of justification*, specializes in arriving at political decisions, at *will-formation*. In so distinguishing opinion- and decision-formation tasks, Habermas (BFN: 298) dissociates himself from calls for direct democracy. Societies marked by immense spatial and temporal complexity need parliament and its representatives to provide the requisite focus for diverse strands of communication. Though part of the “political system,” like administration, parliaments are not bound by systemic codes but rather by temporally restrained procedures of ordinary communication. Lacking the free-flow of interactions defining weak publics, they nonetheless gain in terms of cogency and organization. Decisions or solutions eventually agreed to within these spatially delimited strong publics are then transferred to the administration for implementation. In this mediating fashion, the state as subsystem is tamed and rendered sensitive to the deliberations of ordinary citizens.

Just as we must differentiate the discursive functions of the various parts of state and government, so too must we distinguish various forms of power. Habermas understands power as circulating through a series of “democratic sluices” (BFN: 185-186, 462). Each sluice is contextually specific, tailoring the meaning and function of power to particular tasks requiring fulfilment. As the well-spring of legitimacy, the political public sphere generates *influence*, which, through the sluice of elections, is transformed into a *communicative power* inhering in the legislature. Habermas (BFN: 147) defines communicative power as the fragile, intersubjective “potential of a common will formed in non-coercive [and non-distorted] communication.” Although it must be differentiated from the *employment* and strategic *competition* for power, which define administrative office and party-politics respectively, communicative power underpins these as well as all legitimate law-making procedures (BFN: 149-152). In healthy democracies it undergoes conversion into *administrative power* via legislation secured by parliament. The administration, to which the executive also belongs, then “acts,” whereupon weak publics assess its effect on lifeworld contexts, setting into motion once more the cycle of influence, communicative power and administrative action. Hence Habermas’ reconceptualization of the

constitutional state as the “requirement” that administrative systems be reined in by a “lawmaking communicative power” that minimizes the “illegitimate interventions of social power,” that is, the “factual strength of privileged interests” (*BFN*: 150). In other words, administrative subsystems should undergo a “discursive rationalization” incepted by free-standing publics which, because only the administration can “act” or “rule,” are pivotal to any coherent endorsement of radical democracy.³³

As the foregoing makes clear, for Habermas democracy’s value rests in its capacity to locate and counter injustice. But for democracy to endure two fundamental conditions must be satisfied. On the level of motivation, there must be an over-arching “liberal political culture” shared by a citizenry accustomed to political freedom. Ordinary subjects must understand the rights of private and public autonomy as belonging to their culture, as part of their particular and unique ethical inheritance, of who *they* are. A “constitutional patriotism” dependent on self-identification with basic liberties and rights has to supplant, as Habermas thinks it has in Western Europe, the older “organic” politics of blood and of *Volk* that underlay Weber’s nationalism (*NC*: 256-257; *BFN*: 499-500). Such patriotism allows for a plurality of forms of life without surrendering moral universals.

But for this culture to arise, actors must also be able to “synthesize” and make use of their cultural inheritance. The cultural impoverishment induced by expertism’s fragmenting usurpation of the validity claims of true, right, and good can be undone only if actors, sustained by democratic educative practices, once again appropriate and interrelate truth, morality and art in their everyday life. Philosophy can point to the interconnections between Weber’s “rationality complexes,” to the entanglement of art in science and both of these in interpersonal relations.³⁴ The unity of a reason which has become problematically split since the rise of modernity is, Habermas claims, implied by speech itself, by the fact that every utterance exhibits cognitive, normative, and expressive contents (*TCA*, II: 64, 84, 398; *PDM*: 340). But whether a society really is successful here, whether it thrives on “vital traditions” or suffers “diremption,” is a question philosophy cannot answer. Despite the pretensions of classical thought, philosophy merely points to the general conditions of a rational life. Verdicts as to whether a particular society is “more or less failed, deformed, unhappy, or alienated,” on the contrary, must be left to citizens themselves, for these are

³³ Only “the administrative system itself can ‘act.’” The administration is a subsystem for collectively binding decisions, whereas the communicative structures of the public sphere comprise a far-flung network of sensors” (1996c: 29).

³⁴ Philosophy needs to “set in motion the interplay between the cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive dimensions that has come to a standstill today like a tangled mobile” (*MCCA*: 19).

ethical questions of self-understanding and clarification, of whether we have achieved a happy and flourishing mode of collective being-together (*TCA*, II: 73-74).

That societies might achieve better ways of interrelating cultural value spheres is a reason for being hopeful. However, there is a further condition of vibrant democracy. No meaning-conferring interrelation is possible if the *social* conditions of private and public autonomy are not met. Though critical of state-welfarism, Habermas holds firm to the ideal of a just distributive order. His early insistence that the moral principle of universalization implies also a “principle of beneficence” or concern for the other’s well-being is augmented by his inclusion of welfare-rights within the system of basic rights and his defence of the “principle of separation of state and society” (*MCCA*: 181; *BFN*: 175-176, 402-403). A similar egalitarian commitment also underlies his attempt to contain strategic interaction. The rules of fair bargaining, that no voice be excluded or exploited, are so conceived as to shift the burden of proof onto those actors enjoying unequal social power and privilege.

Yet the immense subsystem of the global market, one dwarfing the state and contemptuous of protective boundaries, threatens the realization of that ideal. With economic globalization, territorial nation-states are increasingly unable to counteract monetary imperatives, which, unlike power, can never be democratized. The consequent whittling away of welfare-state provisions and social rights weakens citizens’ resolve to participate in and to uphold constitutional-democratic institutions (*IO*: 120-124). For Habermas, the import of this latest, transnational stage of modernization is clear. Either we surrender to the neo-liberal vagaries of “locational competition,” where costs are reduced by reducing income and occupational expectations, and thus give up on the power of politics to do anything, or we refocus the thrust of political action from the national to the international sphere (*PNC*: 53-57). Only if we spurn the old politics of “international relations,” only if a “world domestic policy” can be arrived at, will the diverse dangers of social power be countered, and this requires the new integrative mechanism of a cosmopolitan solidarity founded on “supranational” democratic organizations, of which the European Union constitutes a prime example (*PNC*: 55-56, 89-104). The engine of this evolutionary advance is that positive product of globalization, the global public sphere. Just as internal, national political questions hinge on the vibrancy of civil society and autonomous social movements, so too does the future world order. Where Weber saw competition between political leaders, entrepreneurs and nation-states as the mark of a dynamic national and international political order, Habermas imagines citizens cooperatively determining the foundations of their coexistence, foundations reaching beyond the polity into the structures of global politics.

Chapter 4

Critiquing Habermas: Ethics, Norm-Free Sociality, and Strategy

Chapter Three examined Habermas' communicative theory of action and his attempt to rescue modern politics from Weber's "iron cage." Our task now is to critically evaluate that attempt. In positive terms, it will be argued that Habermas' work represents a major advance in reorienting theory on the basis of an intersubjective paradigm (Ch 4.I.i). Stressing the irreducibly social constitution of individual identities, this paradigm undercuts the suppositions impelling Weber's subjectivist account of ethics and politics. So doing, it allows Habermas to thematize the challenge posed by modern social orders without surrendering modernity as a normative project. Most significant for our purposes is the political consequence of this reorientation, that is, the recovery of "legitimacy" as a critical concept and politics as an activity not of technocratic elites or charismatic leaders but potentially of all citizens (Ch 4.I.ii).

Habermas' thought is not without serious difficulties, however. There is, first, his problematic diremption of "ethics," the "good," from "morality," the "right," and his incoherent claim that "discourse ethics" represents merely a minimal, procedural morality (Ch 4.II.i). Understanding "ethics" as largely subjective or conventional, Habermas unwittingly invites a return to Weberian decisionism, since his own theory is, in the end, informed by a substantive ethical vision (Ch 4.II.ii). A second difficulty concerns Habermas' understanding of the processes of critique. Insofar as the "ideal speech situation" tends to efface the inherently multiple routes to emancipation it has, contrary to expectations, slight critical value. Consideration of these philosophical difficulties prepares the ground for an evaluation of his politics. The lifeworld-system dichotomy and its bifurcation of communicative and administrative-economic realms generate an acute tension within Habermas' project, to wit, that he endorses radical democracy but that his categories render such endorsement intrinsically unstable, indeed paradoxical (Ch 4.III.i). This problem of dichotomization also casts doubt upon Habermas' polarized division between communicative and strategic politics (Ch 4.III.iii). In response to Weber's equation of the political with domination, he goes to the opposite extreme of identifying the political with mutual understanding, an identification which is conceptually untenable and breaks down in decisive real-world moments underplayed or simply ignored within Habermasian theory.

4.I.) Habermas' Significance

4.I.i.) Maturity, Intersubjectivity, and the Undamaged Life

Maturity, humanity's coming to awareness of itself and its world, is for Weber and Habermas the prime evaluative criterion and it is against this shared ideal that they judge the goods and evils of modern life. Where they differ, however, is in their characterization of mature personhood. For Weber maturity and its correlate, independence or autonomy, are located *within*, in the self's forthright embrace of a cause which it seeks to imprint on external reality. Coupled with a strict separation of value and fact, this insistence on the individual as the fundamental unit of sociological and normative analysis inevitably leads to the view that merely means, not ends or values, are amenable to rational enquiry. Because modern man faces a plurality of competing values and ideals, and because, as well, his choice between them is fundamentally inscrutable, only the individual, in particular the self-willing charismatic leader, is sovereign in matters of right and wrong.

Habermas takes a very different understanding of maturity. In sharp contrast to Weber's monological subject, he endorses a "relational model of the self" wherein the self is formed not just in interaction with itself and the external world but, more fundamentally, in its interactions with others, the social world (Cooke, 1999a: 185). We saw this most clearly in his discussion of the differentiation and reproduction of lifeworld horizons (Ch 3.I.). Cultural knowledge transmission, social integration, and socialization, the three lifeworld reproductive processes which ensure the continuity of shared meanings through time, solidarity, and a personal identity marked by responsibility, are significant for Habermas insofar as they dispute the classic modern conception of the self as inherited from Descartes, one that reduces reasoning to a solitary activity and the object of reasoning to the external, non-human world. This reductive conception is to Habermas' mind a distortion in three rudimentary senses: in terms of the generation and maintenance of identity, in terms of the concept of freedom or autonomy and the threats to it, and finally, in terms of the vision of modernity implied.

The classic modern conception of the self distorts, first, in failing to account for how mature or responsible human beings *become* who they are. Weber (*PV*: 115) celebrates those who possess a "sense of proportion" in subjecting their aspirations, life-plans, and projects to honest and rigorous re-assessment in the light of changing realities. The goal of the teacher or interlocutor in the vocations of politics and science, he (*SV*: 152) claims, is to "force the individual, or at least ... help him, to give himself an account of the ultimate

meaning of his conduct,” a role in which the interlocutor “fulfils the duty of bringing about self-clarification and a sense of responsibility.” As Habermas rightly contends, however, it is radically unclear in what way, according to Weber’s theory, interlocutors can help or even “force” actors to give an account of themselves in either politics or science. When value is amenable only to individual choice and decision, not discussion, no interlocutor can claim to force or help actors come to self-awareness, for responsibility and honesty, themselves values, are in this conception not shared *between* but instead somehow *possessed* by individual subjects. The problem, therefore, is that Weber’s inner-directed model of the self neglects the processes by which a sense of responsibility is acquired and the intersubjective bonds between actors underpinning these processes.

Habermas is important for giving these bonds of intersubjectivity their due, the truth that becoming an individual is simultaneously a movement of socialization, of becoming a social being. As he makes clear, maturity is an achievement as much as a personal attribute and as an achievement it presumes an “integrative capacity” by which actors organize the conflicting demands of their lives and interactions into relatively coherent wholes (*CES*: 91). Yet this capacity is impossible without their gradual acquisition of *reflexivity* and *reciprocity*, as Mead and many subsequent thinkers have noted (Taylor, 1985: 15-57). As the ability to subject one’s beliefs and utterances to reflection and critique, reflexivity provides the spur to self-consciousness and self-clarification. But reflexivity and self-consciousness are themselves dependent upon a rudimentary contact and reciprocity with others. Without the presence of others with whom one interrelates linguistically a sense of the self’s distinctiveness, its being other to these others and the world, cannot arise.¹ Thus identity and self-consciousness are “not something immediate or purely inward” but in fact form themselves “on the path *from without to within*, through the symbolically mediated relationship to a partner in interaction” (Habermas, 1992a: 177, my italics). Weber can speak intelligibly of a sense of proportion, responsibility, and an obligation to self-clarity, then, only insofar as he already presumes communicative structures of action and interaction. However, the presumption of communicative structures implies shared social meanings that are not optional or chosen but in fact given to us as the socially constituted beings we are. Contra decisionism, therefore, value-rational commitment is not rational simply by dint of its expression of a subjectively held ultimate value, but also in terms of its embeddedness within the sense conferring context of the social world. This social world, similarly, does not

¹ The “identity of socialized individuals forms itself simultaneously in the medium of coming to an understanding with others in language and in the medium of coming to a life-historical and intrasubjective understanding with oneself” (1992a: 153; *TCA*, I: 40-42). See White (1988: 15-16).

simply consist of preferences or static customs and mores but also of ideals and principles that reach beyond the present to posit alternative futures.

An oft repeated counterargument to this view is that the problem of moral scepticism nevertheless persists. It is still open to the sceptic, critics insist, to refuse all communicative engagement with others, to act in a thoroughly decisionist and yet consistent manner (Kambartel, 1974; Lübke, 1990). Habermas, for his part, concedes that it remains *logically* possible for the sceptic to choose this course. However, the cost of this choice is excessive in the extreme. Because even the capacity to choose is acquired in processes of socialization dependent upon extensive relationships of mutual recognition, to deny the importance of communicative structures is in the end to court madness. No sceptic could drop out of the “language game” of everyday life without thereby denying human identity itself.² Hence Habermas’ emphasis on *performative*, rather than logical, contradictions, the truth that what is logically valid may nonetheless be utterly nonsensical in terms of real world activity (Ch 3.II.).

In stressing the intersubjective constitution of human identity Habermas is not denying the possibility of moral conflict or arguing that the intersubjective paradigm will resolve all such conflicts. His goal, instead, is to correct the false supposition shared by positivism, rational choice theory, political realism, and existentialism, that the resolution of moral conflicts is *in principle* rationally impossible. Reorienting perception, this correction also has profound consequences for the concept of freedom or autonomy. Weber understands freedom as an attribute of individuals who in exploiting opportunities contingently thrown up by the world struggle to master that external world and their inner selves (Palonen, 1999: 536). Hence his (*PV*: 117) emphasis on internal discipline, the means of domination, and the inevitable tragedy of frustrated intentions. Although internal discipline and frustrated intention are certainly important, the difficulty with Weber’s view is that by locating freedom within the self and its relation to an objectified world it predisposes theory and practice to a thoroughly instrumental politics guided by the ideal of self-authorship or self-origination. To be free is to be able to mould the world according to one’s own willed ends.

For Habermas, however, this is both a deformation of what it means to be free and an impossibility, since no one can sensibly claim to be the sole author or originator of his existence. Just as identity is a social outcome, so too is freedom a social phenomenon and this means that it is not choosing or deciding *per se* which defines free action, but rather

² See (*MCCA*: 100; 1992a: 192). My argument here relies on Apel (1999: 284) and White (1988: 52).

accountable choice and decision.³ An actor who simply endorses his preferences is not free but impulsive and blind (*JA*: 9-10, 43). To become free in Habermas' sense, to see his preferences from all points of view and thus render them consciously chosen paths of action, he must take into account the opinions of others. The force of this "must" has key epistemological, ontological, and normative dimensions: epistemological insofar as to know one's preferences from all points of view necessitates consideration of opinions voiced from perspectives other than one's own; ontological in the sense that there is no possibility of escaping this interdependence and assuming an Archimedean Point; and normative, finally, to the extent that there must be a minimal regard for others, a willingness to listen. But all this implies that the actor's freedom depends on the freedom of others. Simply put, true freedom is not an individual attribute but an attribute of the *relationships* between individuals, a phenomenon of actors speaking and acting in concert.

As we will see, both Arendt and MacIntyre concur with Habermas on the plural basis of freedom, despite notably different emphases (Ch 6.I., 6.III., 9.III.). The significance of this shared perspective is that it displaces mastery and domination as the guiding theoretical motifs. Politics and ethics are more than the coercion of others and the self according to the dictates of an inner will, and freedom, while it may be directed *against* certain groups and frequently culminate in evil deeds, is also always freedom *with* others, a necessarily joint venture. But with a change in our understanding of maturity and freedom comes a crucial change in our understanding of the threats to mature personhood. We saw Habermas endorses Weber's arguments as to the loss of freedom and meaning in modern societies (Ch 3.III.). The turn to intersubjectivity, however, allows for a more profound comprehension of these threats than Weber's thoroughgoing individualism. When Habermas speaks of the threat of colonization, in the sense of economization and juridification, and the threat of cultural impoverishment, he means not only the diminution of the individual subject, which Weber diagnosed under the rise of specialism and sensualism, but also, and more fundamentally, the deformation of irreplaceable socially grounded *functions, conditions, and capacities*.

Specialism, a consequence of colonization and the rise of hermetically sealed expert cultures, and hedonistic sensualism, a vain reaction to colonization, are under the Habermasian perspective symptoms of larger socio-pathological developments originating in

³ "The self ... is dependent upon recognition by addressees because it generates itself as a response to the demands of the other in the first place. Because others attribute accountability to me, I gradually make myself into the one who I have become in living together with others" (1992a: 170). See Cooke (1999a: 189), McCarthy (1984: xxii), and Wolf (1990: 10-14).

the distortion of key lifeworld-reproductive processes (*TCA*, II: 140-147, 386-396). To Habermas' mind lifeworld sociation presumes intersubjective and intrasubjective functions, including enculturation, the communicative coordination of actions among plural actors, and the formation of group and individual identities, which together yield the "structural aspects" or conditions of the healthy or at least "undamaged" life (*TCA*, II: 144; *MCCA*: 203; *NC*: 69). Whether an effect of market crises being offset by damaging reinterpretations of citizens' basic needs and expectations, as under certain welfare state policies and neo-liberalism, or a result of increasing individual estrangement from collective identities and social obligations, as initiated by the disturbance of familial, communal, and wider social institutions, when socio-pathologies arise they endanger the transmission of cultural knowledge, disrupt the intersubjective bonds ensuring transgenerational solidarity and harmony, and impair the acquisition of cognitive, communicative, and emotional capacities needed for engagement with others and with oneself. What is at stake, consequently, is far more than the individual's freedom of action or the meaningfulness of specific value-commitments, but the irreducibly interpersonal conditions by which freedom and meaningfulness can endure *at all*. In focusing attention almost exclusively on the individual, Weber's analysis is too narrowly construed to comprehend the full impact and import of modern crises.

Here it is important to counter a serious challenge to Habermas' employment of lifeworld reproductive processes. His reliance on reproductive processes, this challenge goes, is not normative but rather sociological-functionalist in pointing to specific facts concerning the perpetuation of certain societies (Vetlesen, 1991: 14; Eriksen & Weigård, 2003: 103). Thus, Habermasian theory is implicitly prejudiced towards conservatism, the maintenance of *existing* sociation patterns, and unable to answer why actors *ought* to foster the transmission of cultural knowledge, solidarity, and the formation of responsible personalities. This challenge is mistaken, however. As Habermas understands them, lifeworld reproductive processes or functions must somehow already pertain in the world, for otherwise they could not be accorded a reproductive status. Yet these functions, which must not be confused with "latent systemic functions," do not simply reproduce *mere* life, as in crude forms of biological functionalism, but are instead informed by a conception of the *healthy* or undamaged life.⁴ Wedded to the notion of health, as opposed to survival, they

⁴ It is imperative to note that the "functionalism" meant here, which has its roots in the Aristotelian ideas of *ergon* (function) and *dynamis* (potentiality), differs dramatically from "functionalism" in the sense of systems theory, which refers to the macrosociological idea of autopoietic sub-systems of action (Ch 3.III., 4.III.i).

therefore operate as anticipatory standards by which to critique existing forms of lifeworld sociation (*TCA*, I: 398). Thus, far from being implicitly conservative, Habermas' theory includes a strong perfectionist element pressing against the boundaries of the given. Admittedly, that perfectionist element is deeply problematized by his insistence on minimal proceduralism, but this is due to a corrigible fault in Habermas' own self-interpretation (Ch 4.II.i). As for the force of "ought," he (*MCCA*: 207-208) readily accepts that if actors have not undergone, or have suffered damaging, socialization processes, they are indeed unlikely to be motivated towards or even comprehend this "ought." Theory is therefore always a handmaid to practice, since awareness of the importance of intersubjective life only stems from having experienced and understood the intricacies of that life.

A robust defence of Habermas on this count is essential for another, more pressing, reason. Later we will criticize his assumption that the modern age represents the culmination of a universal and unilinear developmental logic (Ch 4.III.ii). But this justified criticism must be tempered with the recognition that Habermas' intersubjective turn, his grounding of the notions of identity and freedom on anticipatory interpersonal lifeworld-reproductive functions, serves to rescue the present and our experience of it from an enervating, totalizing pessimism (*PDM*: 119-130; West, 1996: 71). Certainly the modern age is characterized by a technological will to mastery over nature and humanity, as Adorno and Horkheimer, following Weber, made all too clear. There is no denying, as well, that it is torn by conflicts of value threatening the bonds of solidarity. Yet this is but one aspect of a highly ambiguous story. The difficulty with the Cartesian vision of the self perpetuated by Weber and the early Frankfurt School is that it reduces the modern age to a will to mastery. With that reduction it becomes impossible to appreciate the other side of modernity, the at times tragically stubborn commitment to individual and collective freedom attainable under conditions of equality and solidarity. No doubt the ideals of freedom, equality, and solidarity are not unique to Western modernity and have in the modern age frequently been convenient slogans for partisan goals. But so, too, have they inspired and secured praiseworthy amendments to everyday life. We will see that Habermas' explanation of modernity's ambiguity, the destructive movement of colonization, is flawed in positing a dualism that reinforces rather than contests modernity's ills (Ch 4.III.i). But his assertion that modernity, the present we now inhabit, remains normatively meaningful is not. If lifeworld-reproductive processes did not already point to human beings' potentialities, if these potentialities were not already in the world, even if only inchoately, then they could not even be known, let alone striven for.

4.I.ii.) Legitimacy, Legitimation, and Modern Politics

The necessity of repudiating totalizing perspectives, whether optimistic or despairing, will assume full clarity when we come to Arendt's critique of philosophies of history and MacIntyre's disavowal of modernity (Ch 7.I.i, 10.II.i). In the meantime our concern is still Habermas' intersubjective paradigm, in particular its consequence for the concept of legitimacy. We have already documented Weber's understanding of legitimacy or, in his words, "legitimate domination" (Ch 1.II.). Under this view legitimacy equates with "*belief in legitimacy*," belief that has no constitutive connection with normative justification or any value-rational stance, but which can instead be grounded upon a vast number of conflicting value-rational stances, as well as habituation (traditional authority), emotional attachment (charismatic authority), or, as is increasingly the case, simple confidence in legal correctness (legal authority). For Weberian sociology what matters is the *fact* of belief, the probability of a regime's continued existence over time secured by a sufficient number of subjects obligating themselves to the rule of elite groups. As regards modern political orders, this value-sceptical stance has two far-reaching consequences. First, the legitimacy of law is assimilated to a formalist and positivist framework wherein justification reduces to the following of legally enshrined procedures having no bearing to normative principles or ideals.⁵ Second, because the only rationality compatible with formalism and positivism is instrumental rationality, the state, the supreme modern organizational form, transforms into a means for the enforcement of prohibitions, edicts, and contracts.

It is therefore unsurprising that Weber assigned politics to an antinomical dialectic between charismatic leaders and administrative specialists, those whose will arbitrarily establishes the positive legal framework in the first instance and those whose technical-jurisprudential expertise ensures that its form remains subsequently intact. Yet once the intersubjective constitution of human identity and freedom are taken seriously, the implausibility of Weber's conception of legitimacy and law becomes clear. With many others, Habermas thinks it is blatantly untrue that *de facto* belief in legitimacy and the form of law can in themselves be self-confirming.⁶ They could be self-confirming only on the assumption that law forms a self-contained realm and that belief in legitimacy equates with

⁵ Thus, in Weber's (*ES*: 215) view legitimacy equates with "the [formal] legality of rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules." For Habermas' analysis, see (1975a: 97-105; *TCA*, I: 259-269; 1988a: 221-230; *BFN*: 66-73) and Eder (2002: 161-172).

legitimacy *per se*. Were that so, however, the commonplace distinction between “legitimate” and “illegitimate,” the very opposition by which the term “legitimacy” derives its meaning, would no longer make sense, since that distinction presumes criteria separating *de facto* belief and law from *justified* belief and law. Indeed, it is the necessity of such criteria and yet his clear inability to provide them which render Weber’s rejection of the cynical *Machtpolitiker* and impassioned plea for political responsibility at once stridently urgent and yet entirely idiosyncratic (Ch 1.II.).

Habermas’ intersubjective paradigm recovers the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate from Weber’s subjectivist dead-end by placing the concept “belief” within its validating social structures. Because held by actors who cannot but understand themselves in terms of their embeddedness within a socially constituted world, beliefs are comprehensible only within the context of social interaction. Through interaction actors both come to and express their beliefs, make assertions as to what is true, proper, or necessary. They do not, however, simply assert their beliefs, but also provide *reasons* for them. This is so because their beliefs are not self-referential, but always *about* something in or of the shared world. A claim to expert craftsmanship, for instance, is considered idle talk without evidence of craftsmanship, just in the same way that an assertion of the necessity to wage war rings hollow and mad without attention to cause, purpose, and likely consequence, those factors which delineate the necessary from the unnecessary. Thus, in claiming legitimacy for a particular opinion, decision, or act, actors are not merely reporting their belief in its legitimacy but also declaring that their belief has sound foundation, that this opinion, decision, or act *actually* accords with values shared within their society, concurs with what they consented to, or satisfies their needs.⁷ Needs, values, expectations, and consent therefore yield some of the inescapable criteria by which legitimate and illegitimate are routinely separated. The truth that reference to these criteria may be mistaken or even at times ideological does nothing to lessen this point, for the idea of being mistaken or under the spell of ideology presupposes the possibility of being correct and of seeing clearly.

The Weberian social scientist may nonetheless desist here. We can readily concede, he will argue, that beliefs are inevitably interwoven with justifications, but this does not commit social science to anything more than an agnostic notion of justification or legitimation. What is important in predicting the continued existence of particular patterns of behaviour or

⁶ For related critiques of Weber, see, amongst others, Grafstein (1981: 456), Pitkin (1972: 283), Schaar (1969: 284), and Strauss (1953: 49-50).

regimes is ascertaining what grounds or justifications an actor gives for his beliefs, *not* asking whether these justifications are themselves *justifiable* in the sense of being adequate, internally consistent, or cohering with other elements of that actor's worldview. Thus, whether a decision or act genuinely accords with the values, needs, or expectations that lead individuals to think it legitimate is largely irrelevant to its real world efficacy. To ask for more, to go deeper and to link beliefs and their accompanying reasons with the idea of adequate or tenable justification, is to run the danger of blurring the distinction between science and normative philosophy.⁸

Habermas is keenly aware of this objection, linking it to the empiricist supposition, guided by the wish to disassociate science from contestable theories of rational legitimation, that the "appearance of general acceptance or the likelihood of its being assumed" has causal primacy in political science, whose concern, under this view, is simply the acquisition, maintenance and perpetuation of power.⁹ However, this supposition is suspect in two interrelated senses. It is suspect *normatively* in that by neglecting the qualitative distinction drawn by actors between tenable and untenable justifications for ascribing legitimacy to regimes, it falsifies how these actors understand themselves and their activities, reducing the clash of their opinions to a zero-sum struggle for power. Yet when actors express preferences for specific legal orders they claim support for these preferences not in terms of desiring power for power's sake but primarily in terms of material interests such as security or prosperity or in terms of ideals such as fairness, freedom, social justice, and so forth. Without reference to interests and ideals, a preference for one order over another is generally rejected as either ill-conceived or unwarranted. To excise from the concept "justification" the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable arguments, as the empiricist emphasis on the "appearance" or "likelihood" of acceptance does, is therefore to distort the interactions that actually take place between actors by arbitrarily excluding their strongly normative dimension. At minimum, then, the social scientist must show sensitivity to the difference between tenable and untenable justification and acknowledge the role played by normative claims if he is not to *a priori* foist upon actors a self-understanding which they

⁷ Thus, when assessing legitimacy we offer an estimate "of the [actual] *degree of congruence* between a given system of power and the beliefs, values and expectations that provide its justification" (Beetham, 1991: 11, my italics).

⁸ I owe this counter-argument to Professor Russell Keat (personal conversation), but see also Hay (1997: 45-52), Keat & Urry (1975: 196-204), and Lessnoff (1974: 147-152).

⁹ Habermas (1988a: 254; 1979a: 186-187). Under this empiricist view, which Habermas associates with Weber, Schumpeter, Niklas Luhmann and Werner Becker, "one legitimation is as good as another, so long as it sufficiently contributes to stabilizing a given political order" (BFN: 290).

themselves would reject and which he would be loath to ascribe to himself (*MCCA*: 26-32, 47-48).

The empiricist insensitivity to the complexities of citizen interactions is not only normatively questionable, a case of the political scientist arrogantly discounting actors' self-interpretations, but also suspect from a *social scientific* perspective. For the goal of social science is both to document the existence of power structures at given points in time *and*, more fundamentally, to understand why and how power structures endure over time. A regime may enjoy large-scale support at a particular historical juncture, but the more pressing question is whether it will continue to enjoy that support in the future. To answer that question, the scientist must attend to the claims made by the regime, its defence of a just social order or achievement of citizen prosperity. However, to ascertain whether a regime will endure he also has to judge the defensibility of its claims.¹⁰ If, for example, a government declares its policies have secured economic well-being for citizens and yet most citizens languish in poverty, it is highly likely that it will encounter concerted opposition. To avoid this, a government must either engage in a policy of obfuscation, blinding citizens to the reality of their situation, or try to remedy this reality. In coming to this conclusion, the social scientist therefore distinguishes between the rhetoric and the reality of governmental claims. But in distinguishing between rhetoric and reality he necessarily commits himself to truth-criteria underpinning the distinction between tenable and untenable justification, even if these criteria are contestable and inadequately articulated (Beetham, 1991: 10). Thus, the distinction between tenable and untenable claims is not the preserve of normative philosophy solely but in fact a rudimentary article of good social science (*TCA*, I: 269; *BFN*: 330-336).

Given the above argument, there is no possibility of holding to an agnostic notion of justification or legitimation, since scientists are as dependent upon the concepts of adequacy, consistency, and coherence as the citizens whom they study. Once this is accepted, however, Weber's positivist and formalist reading of legitimacy and law ceases to make sense. When legal frameworks are deemed legitimate on account of legitimating reasons, when these reasons make reference to citizens' interests and ideals, and when, finally, a regime stands in danger of delegitimation if its claims to authority fail to cohere with these interests and ideals, then the law cannot be self-contained but requires, instead, justifications arising from everyday lifeworld interactions. As Habermas argues, "belief in legality can produce

¹⁰ "For reasons to be sound and for them to be considered sound are not the same thing, whether we are dealing with reasons for asserting facts [or] for recommending norms and values ... [Thus] the interpreter cannot simply look at and understand such reasons without at least implicitly passing judgement on them *as reasons*" (*MCCA*: 30).

legitimacy only if we *already* presuppose the legitimacy of the legal order that lays down what is legal” (*TCA*, I: 265, my italics). And this presupposition entails the interconnection of legality with normative principles, including, at the most basic level, the equality of citizens before the law, due process, and procedures for criticism and redress. Indeed, Weber gave clear, if inadequate, recognition to this. “Legality,” he (*ES*: 36) wrote, “can be regarded as legitimate in virtue of (i) voluntary agreement among interested parties, (ii) imposition by an authority which is held to be legitimate and therefore meets with compliance.” In neither case, however, is the form of law self-validating; rather, the form of law depends on citizens actively consenting to a specific legal order or, more indirectly, adhering to the injunctions of a government or authority which conforms to their expectations, interests, and ideals (*TCA*, I: 265).

The consequences of Weber’s failure to integrate these insights into his wider theory of law are considerable. As already implied, in excluding criteria for distinguishing tenable from untenable justifications his theory of law is unable to account for processes of delegitimation and change. Thus, it is prejudiced to a peculiar form of conservatism, one not founded upon tradition or habituation, as is typically the case, but instead upon the settled certainties of a judicial elite who understand themselves as administrators to a general, abstract, and calculable system of rules (*ES*: 895; *BFN*: 73). As Habermas (*TCA*, I: 269) sees it, there is a supreme ironism at work here. Decrying the increasing formalization or “mechanized petrification” of social life in late modernity, Weber’s theory of law nonetheless reinforces this process of formalization. The freedom Weber desired for modern individuals therefore suffers unnecessary occlusion in his thought. To break the stranglehold of formal-legal bureaucratization and to allow for individually effected change, Weber was led to the figure of the charismatic leader, the exceptional individual who possesses the strength of will and character to alter the world. But this turn to “plebiscitary democracy” does not so much preserve the principle of individual self-determination as surrender it to an alternative form of domination now unbound by any rules or criteria except those originating within the will of *Reichspräsidenten*, party bosses, and would-be prophets.¹¹ In the Weberian vision the individual is thus doubly enchained, to abstract regulatory systems, on the one hand, and to capricious dictates of will, on the other.

The significance of Habermas’ recovery of legitimacy as a critical concept is that this double enchainment ceases to be a foregone conclusion. Once the structures of power are

¹¹ Habermas (1971b: 62-86; 1979a: 187; *BFN*: 453). See also Beetham (1985: 266), Held (1987: 159), and Mommsen (1989: 33).

understood as being dependent upon justifications arising within the everyday lifeworld, these structures become amenable to the criticisms and interventions of ordinary citizens. The elites which Weber and later Schumpeter privileged are thereby brought to ground and rendered vulnerable to a sustained interrogation of their power and the injustices so often associated with it. The result is to dispel the illusion that politics is inevitably defined by an interplay between bureaucratic machines and their masters or “the factual strength of privileged interests” (*BFN*: 150). More than this, however, the state itself, the prime organ of government and political life, ceases to be the prerogative of an elect few and transforms into the potential possession of all citizens. When government must subject itself to the tribunal of everyday justificatory discourse, then “the only legitimate law is one that emerges from the discursive opinion- and will-formation of equally enfranchised citizens” (*BFN*: 408). The institutional procedures for the production of coercive law and framing of policy are therefore different from the procedures of everyday dialogue in degree, not kind. But this is true only if citizens enjoy personal independence and can articulate their opinions in non-trivial public fora. Hence, as we saw (Ch 3.IV.), Habermas’ argument for the co-originality or equiprimordiality of public and private autonomy. The genuine radicalism of this argument is that the state is no longer simply a means of violence lording over citizens, but also a vehicle for the mutual co-determination of the terms of their shared existence. In modernity, in other words, there exists “no autonomous law without the realization of democracy” (Habermas, 1988a: 279).

In summary, then, Habermas is of profound relevance insofar as his intersubjective turn yields a model of human identity formation providing a far superior understanding of individual maturity, accountability, and freedom than that found in Weberian subjectivism. On the basis of this model and his account of non-pathological lifeworld sociation, he recasts Weber’s “loss of freedom” and loss of meaning” theses without succumbing to totalizing critiques of modernity. Moreover, his arguments against empiricist interpretations of legitimacy and law help reclaim politics as an endeavour and mode of life intimately bound to normative expectations and potentially open to all.

As we will see, however, Habermas’ call for political participation is deeply problematized by his lifeworld-system dualism and celebration of civil society over the state (Ch 4.III.i). But before examining why we must first address certain weighty philosophical difficulties. Habermas’ diremption of “ethics” from “morality” and argument for a minimal proceduralism will be seen to conflict with the substantive and ethical grounds of his theory.

This conflict is exacerbated by his portrayal of ethics in terms that threaten a recrudescence of decisionism and by his understanding of the processes of critique, which is far too narrow and reductive to be convincing.

4.II.) Philosophical Perplexities

4.II.i.) Moral Proceduralism, Ethical Substance, and Diremption

Habermas is convinced discourse ethics provides a viable response to modern value-scepticism. Our argument thus far is that this claim has merit. Nonetheless, the notable fact that Habermasian discourse ethics has elicited contradictory evaluations suggests significant underlying difficulties. Some theorists declare it so formalistic as to be empty, without real normative import.¹² Others contend that it has normative import in a real, substantive sense, delineating the outline of a social order defined by individual autonomy and social equality.¹³ Ironically, both interpretations are correct. Habermas' theory is in fact substantive in two senses: first, insofar as the procedures he isolates presume a specific content and outcome; second, and most significant as regards his critical impulse, in that his understanding of communicative sociation draws upon a substantive *universal-ethical* vision. However, this vision is regrettably obscured by his insistence on procedural minimality and diremption of morality and ethics.

As to the first substantive element, Habermas denies that his theory presumes a specific content or outcome. Discourse ethics locates reason within the regulative procedures of the "ideal speech situation" and, to circumvent Weberian value-scepticism, disavows all content bar that entailed by the presuppositions of a communicative process defined by reflexivity and reciprocity. Yet, as an important debate between Habermas and John Rawls revealed, this pretension to pure proceduralism cannot be sustained. Habermas had long accused Rawls of taking on too much, of trying to prescribe a conception of political justice which "only the actual discourse of real participants can decide" (Rawls, 1995: 138). Rejecting Habermas' criticisms, Rawls' trenchant response is that the justice of *any* procedure depends ultimately on the justice of its outcome, that is, substantive justice. Indeed, Habermas himself suggests as much when he (*BFN*: 445-446) admits discourse ethics "cannot be merely formal," that it "retains a dogmatic core" or idea of autonomy according to which human beings are free "only insofar as they obey just those laws they give themselves in accordance with insights that they have acquired intersubjectively." Habermas believes this idea is "'dogmatic' only in a harmless sense," yet Rawls' point is that this "dogmatic core" is not at all "harmless" but in fact thoroughly substantive inasmuch as it shapes and predetermines results in a particular

¹² See Pettit (1982), Heller (1985: 1-17), Dwars (1992: 67-78), and Campbell (2000: 244-245).

¹³ See Benhabib (1990b: 337-338; 1992: 38-46, 71-76), Dunne (1993: 209-226), Bernstein (1995: 226), and Deflem (1996: 11-12).

direction. This direction gets its meaning from our “considered judgements” regarding offences to human dignity such as slavery, religious persecution, economic exploitation, cruelty, and domination, which act as “substantive checks” on the processes of reaching agreement or compromise. A positive and substantive ideal of autonomy illuminated negatively by persecution therefore limits the reasons which may legitimately enter into discursive processes in order to ensure the desired reasonable outcome, the satisfaction of generalizable interests (Rawls, 1995: 178).

The Habermasian retort is to admit that discourse ethics does presume a degree of substantive content, but nonetheless to insist that the idea of autonomy, the “self-binding of the will by maxims we adopt on the basis of insight,” is *internal* to the workings of a procedural rationality (*IO*: 99-100, 278). Hence, the substantive elements rest not on a potentially contentious understanding of human being-together but on the idea of reason itself. This counter-argument is unconvincing, however. Not only does his reconstruction of rational autonomy rule out slavery or explicit coercion, as would be expected from a theory that identifies reason with free will. It also rules out perspectives considered acceptable by many within mainstream political philosophy. Libertarianism and neo-liberalism, in particular, are excluded as viable political alternatives on account of their “normatively diminished conception of the person” (*PNC*: 93-94). Reducing the self to a “rational decider,” neo-liberalism simultaneously neglects the inviolable moral self of the private person and the public self of the citizen, thus distorting the meaning of private and public autonomy. What interests us here is not the truth or otherwise of this view, even though there are good reasons for believing it true. Rather, Habermas can classify libertarianism as a “normative foreshortening” only because he has *already* located the generation of the self in processes of socialization. Individual personhood, as we saw, is the result of becoming a member of a community (Ch 3.I., 4.I.i). But this implies that the procedures of argumentation rely not on an autonomy internal to a procedural reason, but rather on an autonomy which issues from and is co-extensive with the reproductive structures of society itself. In being material as well as symbolic, these structures cannot be equated with discourse alone, but must also include bodily, emotional, and psychological *needs*.¹⁴ Although these needs are not concretely specified, they underlie Habermas’ inclusion of the principle of beneficence and welfare rights within morality and the constitutional state. Justice and solidarity thereby go hand in glove (*MCCA*: 200). But Habermas can link justice

¹⁴ As is variously argued by Guess (1981: 31), Keat (1981: 198), Lukes (1982: 137, 144), and Moon (1983: 181-183). See White (1988: 69-71, 166) for a contrary interpretation.

and solidarity only by ascribing a social and intersubjective *identity* to the self, and yet identity, by his own theory, is a matter of substance.

It is by highlighting the theoretical work done by this identity that we can comprehend why libertarianism appears automatically excluded from a theory which allegedly does not “prejudice” its functioning in any substantive direction. Far from being procedural, then, autonomy relies on a determinate identification, conception, of the human being as a quintessentially social being. This reliance, however, shows Habermas’ theory to be substantive in a deeper sense than that meant by Rawls, that it presumes a determinate content and outcome but also that this content and outcome are primarily *ethical* in inspiration. Habermas (*TCA*, I: 73) enjoins theorists to refrain from judging the worth of societies, since such judgements are judgements of the “good life” presuming models of “sickness and health” that cannot be captured by the formal conception of procedural rationality underlying his discourse theory. And yet we saw that the critical edge of his critique of 20th century society revolves around the threat of socio-pathologies, sickness, to lifeworld reproductive processes (Ch 3.III., 4.I.i). Anomie, delegitimation, alienation, demotivation, loss of meaning, cultural impoverishment, these all refer to an image of damaged subjectivity and intersubjectivity which, because sickness is *incomprehensible* without reference to health, emanates from an affirmative ethical intimation of the whole or fulfilled life.¹⁵ Socio-pathologies are the twins of healthy lifeworld reproduction, of action coordination through mutual understanding, of stable legitimation, of inner psychic harmony, and so forth. As such they affect in equal manner our ability to work out coherent plans of life, self-realization, and to fix the terms by which we ought to live, self-determination.

Because this positive image of lifeworld reproduction has as much to do with ethical self-realization as moral self-determination, we are entitled to doubt the prime role accorded morality and thus to question Habermas’ separation of moral “norms” from ethical “values” as a feasible response to Weberian subjectivism (Ch 3.II.). Indeed, Habermas himself proposes intimate conceptual interdependencies between ethics and morality. Ethical values, he (*TCA*, I: 89) says, are *candidates* for moral norms that must undergo a generalization test. The motor of this transformation of values into norms is a concomitant *evaluative* transformation of our need interpretations, our willingness to understand ourselves in novel

¹⁵ Indeed, from this it is clear that Habermas goes beyond the liberal perfectionist concern with the conditions of autonomy to posit a strongly socialized personality ideal whose standard is not simply individuality, as in Mill or Raz, but the achievement of individuality in *community* with others.

terms.¹⁶ Moral debate requires not just solidarity or generality but also *hermeneutic* “interventions into the self-understanding of participants who must be willing to revise their descriptions of themselves and others” (*IO*: 42-43). Individual and societal learning processes consist, then, in a limitless exchange of interpretations and experiences enabling us to comprehend more clearly who we are and who we want to become.¹⁷ Moreover, pragmatic, ethical, and moral discourses are merely “*analytically* distinct.” In real political discourse their logics overlap and must be treated simultaneously, a truth which frustrates, Habermas (*BFN*: 565) concedes, his attempt to order “concrete questions in a linear fashion.” Again, deontological morality must go beyond Kant to include within it “those *structural aspects of the good life* that can be distinguished from the concrete totality of specific forms of life” (*MCCA*: 203, my italics). That morality must incorporate these structural aspects is reason to believe that a well-ordered society would be just and relatively happy, one in which all individuals could give effective expression to their individual life goals (*JA*: 152).

But if logics overlap, if arriving at the moral depends on a revision of need interpretations that in turn requires hermeneutic reinterpretations of the self, and if, lastly, morality concerns the general conditions of the good life, then morality and ethics stand in a symbiotic, rather than subordinating, relationship. This symbiosis is not just a conceptual matter, but one also motivating Habermas in terms of pressing contemporary problems. The crime of Auschwitz yields the lens through which he judges the German present and this judging concerns “forms of a *desired* political existence ... and the *values* that shall predominate in it” (*PNC*: 28, my italics). The Nazi legacy demands an “ethical-political discourse of collective self-understanding” wherein ideals of personhood and of political responsibility undergo reassessment (*PNC*: 37). Such reassessment goes to the heart of political life. No moral order endures without anchorage in citizen’s motivations. Just as Habermas’ discourse ethics presumes a dogmatic, substantive core, so too does it rely on a political culture that has become significant *for us*, for our identities (*BFN*: 445-446). Morality needs to grow upon the soil of everyday lifeworlds so as to become the guiding self-understanding of civil society and the public sphere. Culture transforms abstract moral injunctions into a concrete and particular ethical identity and thereby constitutes, in the final instance, the only barrier to threats to integrity and diversity (*BFN*: 500). Integrity and diversity, at once both moral and ethical concepts because presuming inviolability and a

¹⁶ Hermeneutic experience in fact prevents the “stagnation of the structures of practical discourse” (Habermas, 1979b: 59, quoted in White, 1988: 83).

valued plurality, also underlie Habermas' recent concern with the politics of cloning. Here especially the ethical and the moral become indistinguishable. The "revulsion provoked by the vision of cloned human replicas" issues from a moral abhorrence at the loss of reciprocity, of the scientist as master and the clone as his product, but this abhorrence ultimately has ethical grounds in the "irreversible effects of the arbitrary decision of another person on *"me"* --- not insofar as I exist at all, but rather on the essential conditions of my *self-understanding*" (*PNC*: 163, 172; 2003a: 39-40, my italics). What stands threatened here is not an identity limited to one subject or to a single community, but an identity comprising humanity as a whole. Habermas' revulsion at genetic engineering has a *universal-ethical* basis.

This basis shows that the validity claims of right and good are conceptually and practically indistinct. Insofar as the moral seeks to uncover generalizable interests it seeks, too, to define what is universally good for human beings. Yet Habermas' theory is unable to appreciate this overlap. Although he pictures the relation between differentiated rationality complexes in a less antagonistic light than Weber, in adopting the same diremptive strategy he perpetuates these antagonisms.¹⁷ Habermas travels with Weber down the path of diremption but then calls a halt before the image of cultural impoverishment. Differentiation must stop short, we are told, of fragmenting everyday consciousness (Ch 3.III.). Yet the paradox here is that Habermas calls into question the very thing that he prizes in modernity, the structural differentiation of the lifeworld. His (*TCA*, II: 397-398) solution is to call for a balanced rationalization to counter one-sidedness but this balance, insofar as it concerns normative questions, again sits ill with his privileging of morality. It also runs against his attempt to presumptively categorize questions as either moral, ethical, or pragmatic. Questions of ecology and environmental protection, for instance, are considered ethical whereas human welfare is ascribed to the moral, since "moral problems only arise within the circle of subjects capable of participating in discourse" on the basis of equal responsibility (*JA*: 105). This stipulation of a strict mutual responsibility limits morality to the interactions between equally "rational" beings. But Habermas himself goes on to question the anthropocentric "narcissism" of this limitation (*MCCA*: 211; *JA*: 107-111). Not only are

¹⁷ As when Habermas (*TCA*, I: 238) claims that within the ethical-existential rationality complex "knowledge can take the form of authentic interpretations of need, interpretations that have to be renewed in each historically changed set of circumstances."

¹⁸ Habermas' division of the "world into distinct domains of validity cannot be regarded as an innocent methodological manoeuvre" because "once the constitutive or ontological unity of the social is acknowledged, Habermas' formal account of balancing validity spheres ... begins to look like a reification" (Bernstein, 1995: 232). See also Love (1995: 57-63) and Dews (1999: 20-21).

environmental questions normatively urgent, but this urgency equals in significance the question of justice between rational humans. Approached through the categories of his theory, the narrow scope and referent of the moral represent an impoverishment of which Habermas himself is painfully aware.

4.II.ii.) Ethics, Subjectivism, and Critique

Insofar as he demands that substantive questions be avoided in favour of a proceduralism nonetheless underpinned by these questions, Habermas stands caught within a “strange pragmatic contradiction” (Taylor, 1989: 88). Our argument has therefore been that Habermas misinterprets himself on account of false emphases. This misinterpretation is regrettable, we will see (Ch 10.I.i, 11.II.), precisely because it is questions of substance, the good, which form the bedrock of political endeavour. Here, however, we consider two further difficulties. Related to the foregoing discussion, the first again concerns Habermas’ understanding of the good, an understanding which not only leads him to mischaracterize his project but also to *undermine* it. The second concerns his understanding of critique, whether the “ideal speech situation” is an adequate conceptualization of the conditions of non-dominative interaction.

Habermas’ self-misinterpretation underlies his denunciation of philosophical attempts to lay bare the contours of the good life. The neo-Aristotelian and neo-Hegelian philosophies of MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum and Charles Taylor repeat the errors of classical theories by ontologizing or reifying “goods and values into entities existing in themselves” (*BFN*: 256). This metaphysical or “moral realism,” that there is a “purpose” to human existence discernible by philosophy, depends on the discredited conviction that the universe forms a meaningful teleological order within which human beings occupy a pre-given space.¹⁹ Under the conditions of a post-metaphysical modernity defined by a plurality of value systems, all philosophy can do is delineate the basis of the moral point of view (*JA*: 74-76). By stressing the good above right, moral- or metaphysical-realist theories endanger the priority of norms over values and thus render the deontological, what is unconditionally binding, subordinate to the teleological, what is relatively binding. Dangerous subjective and utilitarian logics thereby threaten to override the deontological principles of “human

¹⁹ It is important to recall that “moral” or “metaphysical realism” has an entirely different meaning to “political realism” (Ch 1.II.). The former contends that moral ideals, beliefs, et cetera, have an objective status; the latter, that politics is, as Hobbes said, a realm of hostility and conflict.

dignity, solidarity, self-realization, and autonomy” in the name of expediency or of parochial non-universal interests (*BFN*: 257).

Yet, given our arguments so far, this critique appears untenable. For all his talk about a post-metaphysical age, Habermas’ own elucidation of the structures of communication is itself “morally realist.” As the well-spring of normativity, moral life moves within an objective scheme of discourses governed by non-subjective and therefore compelling validity claims. Even if subject to differing interpretations, the rules of communication “play the *same* role in every language community,” existing outside the self in a social world defined by “essential” linguistic structures.²⁰ Furthermore, in a manner not dissimilar to neo-Hegelian and neo-Aristotelian theories, Habermas also asserts a purpose or teleology to human life, the attainment of mature selfhood. This teleology, as neo-Aristotelians readily acknowledge, depends on processes of socialization.²¹ The mature self is not a self isolated from others in his vocation, but a self that comes into being intersubjectively, as an individual among others. To the extent, then, that Habermas shares such ground with moral realists, his “deontological principles” of human dignity and solidarity can reasonably be interpreted as requisite elements of the good life, of *eudaimonia* in the classical sense

Habermas resists this interpretation on account of a fundamental confusion that imperils the foundation of his theory. Simply put, deontology and teleology need not, as Habermas believes, conflict. Human *teloi* are neither merely “conventional,” a matter of community specific *ethoi*, “utilitarian,” a matter of desire maximization, nor “subjective,” a question of individual or collective will, the three ways in which Habermas (1988a: 227; *BFN*: 254-261; *IO*: 54-56) understands the good. The latter understanding is especially problematic. The theories of the good discussed above do not adopt a subjective logic wherein values are chosen according to individual or collective preference. Rather, they locate and analyse those capacities and goals that render human life worthy of living, capacities and goals that are not “relatively binding” but indeed inviolable.

Against this view, Habermas (Ch 3.II.) argues that ethical *teloi* are questions of “more or less,” lack the coherence and obligatoriness of norms, and are assessed according to the urgency of desire. The problem here, however, is that the separation of norm and value on the basis of coherence is unfounded. It is clearly the case, for instance, that the norms of

²⁰ Rational reconstructions “reproduce the pre-theoretical knowledge that they explicate only in an *essentialist* sense; if they are true, they have to *correspond* precisely to the rules that are operatively effective in the object-domain” (*CES*: 16). On Habermas’ moral realism, see Outhwaite (1994: 36).

²¹ As Habermas (1986: 207-208) himself puts it: “Aristotle was right in his opinion that the moral intuitions which theory clarifies must have been acquired elsewhere, in more or less socialization processes.” See Dunne (1993: 213-216).

personal liberty and social justice conflict and that even well-ordered societies have at times to adjudicate between clashing moral imperatives. Thus, he vainly tries to apportion fundamental disagreement to a neatly enclosed sphere of interaction, when in truth it inheres within interaction as such. His attempt to side-step Weber's subjectivism by separating rationally amenable norms from clashing values therefore fails. Furthermore, once it is recognized that the ground of Habermas' critical vision is itself ethical, then his characterization of ethics as preferential, subjective, and ineluctably contradictory entails a surreptitious *surrender* to Weberian decisionism. Dependent on a vision of non-pathological living together, Habermas' ideals of solidarity, self-determination, and self-realization are *prime goods* which stand in danger of being consigned to arbitrary willing if ethical discourse is denied an adequately rational status. In denying ethical discourse this status, Habermas not only fails to account for the goods that impel his work but actually appears to imperil them. Despite the real advances of his intersubjective paradigm, it is he, not the moral realists, who presupposes a hazardous subjective logic.

We will return to the question of ethics and subjectivism later (Ch 7.II.ii, 9.III., 10.I.i). Here it suffices to note that Habermas' misappraisal of ethics stems in part from his concern to isolate the universal, the goal of critique. Because intimately tied to plural identities, the good is (mistakenly) thought an unsuitable foundation for that quest. As a discourse of *justification*, morality demands abstraction from the particularities of history, identity, and desire. Habermas believes this abstraction ensures the possibility of arriving at generalizable interests. A difficulty with deontological abstraction, however, is moral rigorism or indifference towards the peculiarities of particular situations. To counter the desensitizing acontextuality of justificatory discourse, Habermas argues for a supplementary discourse of *application* so that abstract norms find purchase within concrete situations (Ch 3.II.). Anxious to circumvent the Aristotelian emphasis on experience and formative traditions, he maintains that morally right action cannot be decided in a single moment of justification. Rather, it requires a two-stage process of argument consisting of justification followed by the application of norms according to the criterion of "appropriateness." Thus, impartial judgement implies that a norm is "*valid and appropriate whenever the consequences and side effects of its general observance for the interests of each individual in every particular situation can be accepted by all*" (Günther, 1988: 50, quoted in *JA*: 36).

In the first order moment of justification participants take into account the consequences of a norm's enactment, but because they merely possess knowledge of the present, not the future, and can only imagine general scenarios in which a norm would have this or that

effect, they cannot be expected at this stage of discourse to come up with the right answer for all possible circumstances. Justified norms bear a “time and knowledge index” necessitating the revision of earlier justifications when the historical conditions undergirding their framework alter. The social world has an inescapable historical character, but this “existential provinciality” does not weaken the deontological basis of norms, for it assumes that, even though the meaning of norms changes with the passage of time, “the moral point of view [i.e., moral validity and its presuppositions] remains identical” (*JA*: 39, 162). The second order moment of application saves deontology from rigorism through a two way hermeneutic relation of valid norms to specific situations and from these situations back, in turn, to the abstract conditions of a norm’s applicability as specified in its first order justification. In doing so, moreover, application generates a coherent normative order. Norms eclipsed within the horizon of a particular moment lose none of their validity but are instead subordinated to and combined with that norm relevant to the situation defined as exhaustively as possible.

Yet, as with his failed attempt to separate ethical value and moral norm, this attempt to differentiate and yet interrelate universal justification and particular application also runs aground. It is not that we come to a universal norm first and then apply it to a particular context; rather, norms issue and only make sense from the perspective of concrete predicaments. The very fact that in the first order moment of justification participants consider the consequences of a norm’s enactment within “standard situations whose salient features have been *integrated from the outset*” means that they are already performing an “applicatory” task (*JA*: 13, my italics). “Standard situations” are only standard because experience shows they tend to recur or are basic in moral-ethical life. To know whether a norm should be endorsed involves imagining it at work in society, our imagination drawing its contours from the actual societies in which we live. Instead, then, of just one level of application at work in discourse ethics there are in fact two, the first order moment of application-justification indicating just as strongly as the second order moment actors’ dependence on received knowledge, history, and personal and communal experience. There is, then, no possibility of isolating an “identical” core in justificatory discourse. The two-way flow of hermeneutic insight changes our awareness both of universal and particular (Bernstein, 1995: 223). Because application and archetypal contexts are basic to justification, morality depends on a prior knowledge of the effects proposed norms would likely have on real, not hypothetical, situations which, as they alter, alter the meaning of

morality. But when hermeneutic proficiency becomes a precondition of justification, then the universal and particular stand in an intimate and indivisible symbiotic interrelation.

A number of consequences follow. First, Habermas' differentiation of *I* and *we* from *all* as the criterion for demarcating moral discourse founders. Superficially this differentiation makes sense. Arguments for interests that *only* affect me or us and no others have a different referent than arguments for interests that purportedly affect all human beings. Yet, given the historicity and contextual rootedness of argumentation, its reliance on an hermeneutic proficiency drawing upon experience, and the fact that real discourse could never include all human beings as participants, arguments for the interests of "all" must always be made from the position of a determinate "we."²² There exists, then, no means by which to separate the voice of "we" from "all" where general interests are at stake, no means to rid these interests of their historical and dialogic specificity. Nor would it be desirable to so rid them, since these interests get their sense from such specificity (McCarthy, 1998: 127). Acceptance of this truth about moral-ethical life means a different understanding of normative questioning. The question to be asked in discourse is not simply "what would all agree to?" but rather "what would all agree to if faced by the circumstances we face, the real needs we share, and the unique events contributing to them?" A universalizing *intent* is tied here to a necessarily particular perspective or historical locatedness. Although, for example, the Holocaust primarily affected the Jews, Gypsies, and Germans and can only be understood through the particularities of their interrelation, these unique particularities nonetheless have a universal significance that comes to light when we try to imagine whether, under those particularities, the same calamity would have befallen us. In so imagining, the history of the Holocaust and our unique histories interpenetrate. Yet by insisting on a first order moment of abstraction Habermas effectively prevents the achievement of this interpenetration.²³

These criticisms go to the heart of Habermas' theory. Because normative universals issue from concrete particularities, his abstract "ideal speech situation" cannot do the critical work he intends. Indeed, far from clarifying the grounds for critique, it reductively mischaracterizes a multidimensional and complex phenomenon. The point is a simple one. If subject to a strict implementation of rules 3.1 – 3.3 many unproblematic everyday activities would be declared inherently unjust on account of presuming unequal competence between actors or limits on what may be introduced into debate. For instance, by his own

²² Discourse can never be totally inclusive in that future generations are *necessarily* non-participants. We will return to this presently (Ch 4.III.ii).

²³ Moreover, because deontological morality is in principle context-transcending it cannot, as Pensky (1999: 223) observes, encompass "the moral *uniqueness*" of the Holocaust.

criteria Habermas' favoured mode of public discourse, the journal article, would appear inherently flawed. Far from being open to all (rule 3.1) and receptive to every idea or self-expression (rule 3.2 a – 3.2 c), article writing is subject to non-voluntary, non-consensually arrived at standards of quality and professionalism that have to be achieved or learned before one can participate within academic and literary spheres. These standards are upheld through editing, which as both institution and social relation relies on an asymmetrical apportioning of authority. A similar apportioning defines the roles of chairperson, party leader, and judge.

Yet this everyday asymmetry is not usually thought to be oppressive. Although he never addresses this problem directly, Habermas tries to side-step it by emphasizing the *regulative* function of the "ideal speech situation." The conditions of that situation can never be fulfilled, yet as regulative ideals they "must be satisfied to a sufficient degree," achieve an "approximate fulfilment" (*JA*: 164-165; 1992b: 448-449). But the exact meaning of "sufficient" or "approximate" is obscure. It can mean *either* that the rules themselves will be interpreted differently depending on the activity or scenario at hand *or* that their meaning remains constant but that they only ever find partial recognition. Given our assertion that application entails a transformation of justified norms, that the core does not remain "identical," we have to rule out the latter possibility. But the former understanding entails that the nature of critique alters depending on the matter at hand. It entails furthermore that any reduction of emancipatory paths to a set of rules impoverishes our understanding of the multiple varieties and sources of critical awareness.²⁴ In rigidly determining the path of critique, the "ideal speech situation" amounts, if taken literally, to little more than a crude method or rule of thumb. It cannot cope with the varieties of activity in which human beings engage and, decisively, fails to account for the role of experience in these activities.²⁵ Although he gives an impressive answer to Weber's de-radicalization of legitimation processes, this answer suffers from an oversimplifying urge to render action abstract. This abstraction renders us, in turn, blind to the historical and practical particularities that grant activities their meaning.

²⁴ Habermas' (*JA*: 171) admission that we quickly recognize, "like ethnologists integrated into a foreign society, how emancipated ... our surroundings really are," suggests that critique takes its orientation not from determinate rules but from experiencing and living the effects of diverse activities.

²⁵ Habermas (*TCA*, II: 181-183, 273-283) does speak in passing of actors who, because knowledgeable or morally exemplary, have an unequal but laudable "influence" over others. The

We will return to the entwinement of universal and particular, the dependence of critique on experience, and the multidimensionality of argumentative validity when we consider MacIntyre's idea of practices (Ch 10.I.ii). To summarize our argument thus far, we have shown that Habermas' project is primarily ethical and that insofar as he subordinates ethics to a procedural morality he stands guilty of misinterpreting himself. This self-misinterpretation is exacerbated by a subjective reading of ethics which, in threatening a return to Weberian decisionism, imperils the gains of his intersubjective turn. In the following it will be maintained that these philosophical failings are accompanied by noteworthy political failings. Habermas' diremption of system and lifeworld leads to a dualist politics in which citizen's capacities suffer severe curtailment. Questioning this dualism, we are also led to question his dichotomization of strategic and communicative action, a dichotomy which purges lifeworld of contestation and glosses over the acute uncertainty that frequently accompanies political action.

problem, however, is that he fails to explore the normative grounds of this unequal apportioning of authority.

4.III.) Norm-Free Sociality and Political Strategy

4.III.i.) “Radical Reformism”: a Paradoxical Politics

Habermas’ believes his “radical reformist” project “radical” insofar as its ideals of self-determination and self-realization entail that only those political and economic orders permitting extensive citizen participation are just. Hence his “twin-track” model based on an interplay of weak and strong publics which, through democratic “sluices,” enables civil society to direct administrative subsystems (Ch 3.IV.). This interplay is “reformist” rather than revolutionary, Habermas insists, in respecting the “complexity” of modern societies, the independent logics of administrative and market subsystems.

Important questions need to be asked of Habermas here. The first concerns his “two-track” model, whether it in truth is as radical as he supposes. The second concerns his emphasis on “weak publics” or civil society and whether these publics can and should provide the central focus of citizen energies. The third, and most important, concerns the lifeworld-system dualism on which his “two-track” model and celebration of civil society rely. Delving deeper into his thought, it becomes clear that serious tensions abound, suggesting that Habermas’ “radical reformist” perspective is paradoxical, at once both critical of and yet augmenting Weber’s image of the “iron cage.”

As to the “two-track” model, Habermas is confident that through the democratic transformation of “influence” into “communicative power” and thereafter by the legislature into “administrative power,” individuals within civil society can bring administrative subsystems to heel. It is telling, however, that when it comes to everyday politics he argues that a “countercirculation” of power runs against the “official” circulation of power from the public sphere into legislature and then into administration.²⁶ Under “normal” conditions “bureaucracies prepare laws ... parliaments pass laws and budgets, party headquarters conduct election campaigns, clients exert influence on their ‘administrations’” (*BFN*: 356). That administrations and the executive and not parliament or the public sphere “possess the power and initiative to get problems on the agenda” in moments of normality should not be regarded as a terrible failure, for such routinization helps ease the considerable cost of communicative opinion and will formation (*BFN*: 357, 380). Only in “exceptional” moments do parliament and, less directly, the public sphere assume a dominant role. At

²⁶ Habermas (*BFN*: 323-325, 354-358) draws this argument from Bernhard Peters’ (1993) account of modern constitutional democracies. What is interesting about Peters, as Scheuerman (1999: 166) points out, is that his perspective is not at all critical-theoretical but in fact located within the political realist tradition of Weber and Schumpeter.

crisis times the public sphere forces “an extraordinary mode of problem solving” by which parliament can thereafter actually determine the direction of power (*BFN*: 357).

Although Habermas’ thinks this accords with critical visions of democracy, it is patently clear that a politics which in “normal” times rests in the hands of elites differs in no significant manner from existing representative democracy. However, the problem does not just lie with Habermas’ portrayal of “normal” politics. His normative-descriptive characterization of weak and strong publics, the gap between the public sphere and the state, *already* divides opinion and will formation into discrete domains, bestowing upon ordinary citizens merely the capacity to arrive at convictions in “subjectless” modes of communication, with periodic elections and occasional acts of civil disobedience as their sole direct control upon leaders. This sharp division of competencies renders Habermasian deliberative democracy difficult to comprehend as a radical-democratic project, for within it popular sovereignty reduces to an attenuated, anaemic kind. Against this attenuation, critics (Bohman, 1994: 925; Ferrara, 1999: 69) rightly point out that a robustly democratic order would instead be one in which opinion- and will-formation were not separated but in fact largely *coincided*. Such an order need not presume direct democracy, a gargantuan assembly comprising all citizens, or a vision of the citizenry as some “macro-subject,” as Habermas (*IO*: 248) alleges. Rather, it presumes institutional mechanisms by which discrete individuals can publicly deliberate pressing concerns *and* act upon their deliberations (Cohen, 1989: 17-34). But this is also, we saw (Ch 3.IV., 4.I.i), the presupposition of Habermas’ (*BFN*: 121) argument regarding the equiprimordiality of private and public autonomy, that for citizens to enjoy their private liberties they must participate “in the practice of politically autonomous lawmaking.” The paradox of Habermasian “radical reformism,” then, is that it extols the modern constitutional state as an institution in which private and public autonomy are co-original and yet that state is *not* a site of popular political participation.

Thus, by introducing a substantial gap between opinion and will, discourse and action, Habermas lessens the critical force of his theory. Questioning this gap leads naturally to our second query, the role of “weak publics” or civil society. Habermas privileges civil society because of its informal and therefore non-colonized character, in contrast to the power-ridden, formal organizational character of strong publics, state administrations, and corporations. Yet many of his observations undercut any easy normative distinction between colonized formal organization and non-colonized informal organization, thereby throwing into doubt the public sphere’s monopoly on emancipatory potentials. Wild and anarchic,

“weak” publics may indeed allow for a greater number of voices than formally organized “strong” publics, but they are also far more vulnerable to the whims of social power and structural violence (*BFN*: 307-308). Indeed, the “democratic potential of [the] public sphere” is rendered “ambivalent” by “the growing selective constraints imposed by electronic mass media” (1992b: 456-457). Just as such media enable greater flexibility and reach of message, thus disrupting unjust hierarchies, so too do they close down identities and reinforce received views and interests. Within the public sphere, then, the green activist and advertising mogul make use of the same “arsenal,” except that the latter’s use is abetted by a distinct superiority in material and organizational resources.²⁷

Given these admissions, it is highly unlikely that a public sphere which permits government and non-governmental organizations to dominate decision-making processes in times of normalcy would have the strength to reverse that dominance in times of crisis. We will return to this when discussing Arendtian “substantive citizenship” (Ch 7.I.ii), but here we should note that the progressive movements Habermas admires rarely limit themselves to a wild and anarchic interplay of words. They, too, coalesce into formally structured organizations and thus gain the stability and material wherewithal to campaign over long periods of time. To counteract corporate lobby groups, they become like those groups in many respects. What all this means is that a critical politics, if such is possible, cannot rely on civil society or the public sphere alone, but must also incorporate aspects and enter into the operations of formally organized institutions, especially the state.

In scattered but noteworthy passages Habermas comes close this view. Although opposing communicative to administrative power, insisting that they adhere to alien principles, he nonetheless proceeds to call for the institutionalization of communicative fora *within* formal organizations and state bodies. Ombudspersons, judicial hearings, citizen and client participation --- these are the means by which to *internally* democratize administrative structures, demanding “an interplay of institutional imagination and cautious experimentation” (*BFN*: 191, 440-441). Here Habermas briefly returns to his 1960s contention that emancipation lay in nurturing *intraorganizational* communication and participation, a remoulding of parties, lobbying groups, and the opening-up of state organs.²⁸ This suggests an emancipatory path that avoids privileging civil society or opposing communicative to administrative power.

²⁷ On the power of corporations in civil society, see Ehrenberg (1999: 224), Scheuerman (1999: 167), Stokes (1998: 128-134), and Shapiro (1999: 34-35).

However, Habermas is prevented from consistently following this emancipatory path on account of his lifeworld-system dichotomy. By separating “lifeworld rationalization” from “systemic modernization” Habermas believed he could rescue “the project of modernity” from Weber’s vision of creeping instrumentalization (Ch 3.III.). As many have argued, however, the costs of this rescue attempt are exceptionally high.²⁹ The core problem is that Habermas transforms an initially analytic distinction between lifeworld and systemic integration into an essentialist dichotomy whose effect is to bifurcate communicative from strategic action, symbolic from material reproduction, by assigning each to ontologically opposed realms, the one a sphere of conscious human interaction, the other guided by “latent” and opaque “systemic functions.”³⁰ The profound interrelation of communication and strategy in all action contexts, whether symbolic or material, therefore disappears from view. More gravely still, in ascribing formally constituted organizations and material reproduction to a “norm-free” systemic rationality, Habermas (*TCA*, I: 309) rules out, by unsubstantiated theoretical *fiat*, important possibilities for conscious intervention and change (McCarthy, 1991: 127-130; Bohman, 1999: 61-62, 76). Only by denying such possibilities can he single out the lifeworld and public sphere as the loci of emancipatory energies, even though they are permeated with oppressive relations.

Habermas believes he can accommodate these criticisms. He insists that both communication and strategy occur within lifeworld contexts and that he therefore does not neglect the negativity of power in these contexts. Nor does he (1991a: 258) equate system with strategic action, even though formally constituted organizations do exhibit “an affinity to purposive-rational action.” As to his use of systems theory, he maintains that because the action-theoretic concepts of communicative and strategic action are bound to the presupposition of conscious intentions, they cannot fully grasp the phenomena of state and market and their respective steering media of power and money. A systemic-functional analysis is instead required to illuminate how such media “remain *external to the structures of [conscious] action*” as mechanisms integrating partially perceived, unintentional action consequences (1991a: 252; 1992b: 443-444). Bureaucrats and economic agents do

²⁸ Then he (*STPS*: 209) believed bureaucracies “must first be organized in accord with the principle of publicity and must institutionally permit an intraparty or intra-associational democracy --- to allow for unhampered communication and public rational-critical debate.”

²⁹ See Misgeld (1985: 56-69), Rasmussen (1990: 45-55), Joas (1991: 116-118), McCarthy (1991), Bohman (1999: 75-77), Honneth (1999: 333-334), Scheuerman (1999: 168-172), and Leet (2002: 24-27). These theorists reflect critiques (Albert & Hahnel, 1981: 58-59; Giddens, 1982) of Habermas’ (1974: 142-169) early distinction between “labour” and “interaction.”

³⁰ Again, it is vitally important to distinguish this systemic functionalism, which works “behind the backs” of actors, from the normatively informed functionalism discussed earlier (Ch 4.I.i).

consciously aim for individual and collective goals, but the point is not that such actions do not occur within systems, but rather that they do so “under the premises” of media that narrowly circumscribe opportunities for thought and intentional deed (*TCA*, II: 310-311).

This accommodation succeeds only superficially, however. Objections are acknowledged but Habermas does not really “*acknowledge* acknowledging” them, for his key categories remain unchanged (Herrnstein-Smith, 1997: 112). He denies identifying lifeworld with communicative action but then goes on to declare the goal of his lifeworld-system opposition to be one of highlighting the “switch *from* communicative action *to* media-steered interaction” (1991a: 262, my italics). This reinforces the impression that lifeworld relations are, notwithstanding exceptions, primarily communicative, the very thing critics object to. The same, too, with system and strategic action. When the steering media of power and money are said to “demand a strategic stance” from actors and when there exists a real “affinity” between systemic steering media and purposive rationality, albeit it now “latent,” then Habermas’ (1991a: 254) avowal that he avoids equating system and strategy falls decidedly flat. The accusation of *ontological spatializing*, of according distinct logics to opposed realms of being, holds.

The consequences of this spatialization are far-reaching, especially as regards those activities falling under “system.” Habermas’ recourse to systems theory was intended to illuminate how systemic disequilibria are offset at the cost of lifeworld pathologies, thus giving theory a firm frame of critical reference. Unfortunately, his (*TCA*, II: 154, 258) identification of state and market with functional “blocks of norm-free sociality” in which “norm-conformative attitudes and identity-forming relationships are neither necessary nor possible” has the peculiar effect of isolating such deformations from critique. For to assert that the coordinative actions of individuals within formally constituted organizations fall “under the premises” of latent functionality is to place severe theoretical limits on the scope for individual discretion and accountability in these organizations. The injustices suffered by men and women are then no longer attributable to individual or group deeds but instead issue from some reified, concealed logic. But even the most hierarchical organizations give little reason to believe that coordination occurs through unconscious latent functions, alone or primarily (McCarthy, 1991: 129-131). Such coordination can occur through actors following orders consciously, out of habit, or under the threat of sanction, though more usually a combination of all three. If managers and leaders are simply voice pieces to steering media working behind their backs, as Habermas’ deployment of systems theory implies, then it is not they but the media they serve that has discretion. Yet he shies away

from drawing this conclusion. Condemning Helmut Kohl's government for having reduced German reunification to a technical economic question, thus preventing debate as to a new constitution, he (1994: 33-54) is adamant that this reduction resulted from deliberate neo-conservative policy, not money or power *per se*.

It is in economic matters, however, that Habermas' lifeworld-system dualism has its most regrettable effect. Because constituted by the medium of money, which is far more "deworloded" than power, the capitalist market has gained an "autonomy" unachievable by state bureaucracies.³¹ Moreover, for Habermas (*TCA*, II: 340), as for Weber, market capitalism represents a superior economic form, the only efficient means by which to determine equivalences between disparate goods and interrelate spatially distant actions. Consequently, although Habermas has been interpreted as a resource for alternative conceptions of economic order, his work stands in tension with such rethinking. He (1991a: 261) defers to Marx's concept of "use value," celebrating those movements endeavouring to realize an economic practice "no longer oriented to profit [alone]." And yet his (*TCA*, II: 396) general attitude towards those movements is that they "unrealistic." Imprisoned within the sentimental dream of a fundamental reorientation of economic practice, they, like Marx before them, have yet to come to terms with the "hard-to-resist imperatives" and "functional demands" of "a globalized system of market relations" (*PNC*: 124).

Yet what Habermas obscures from view in interpreting market interactions in systemic-functional terms are the venerable *normative* arguments upholding this institution, that the market supposedly ensures individual freedom and prosperity.³² Obscuring these arguments, he also veils important normative counterarguments to market capitalism, one of the most significant being that under capitalism the productive capacities of human beings suffer avertable distortion. Habermas believes his "colonization" thesis an apposite diagnosis of capitalism's ill-effects. The difficulty with this thesis, however, is that it suggests these ill-effects are due to something *extrinsic*, the structures of material reproduction, invading something *intrinsic* or uniquely human, symbolic reproduction. Attributing an extrinsic status to the material, "colonization" as a theoretical device is therefore fundamentally *uncritical*, a capitulation which in its very conception already forfeits labour and human beings' productive capacities to the latent functionalism of system. With it the social and psychological significance of one's work and occupation, their role in forming lifeworld

³¹ Owing "to the nature of the medium of power and the way in which it is institutionally anchored in the lifeworld, [the political system] remains *more* dependent on its environments [lifeworld] than does the economic system" (1991a: 259; *PDM*: 350-352).

identities, is suppressed and thereby distanced from critical assessment (Honneth, 1999: 334; 2001: 54). Thus, while Habermas (*TCA*, II: 393) may wish to protect “endangered ways of life,” his ascription of the material to the systemic prevents any articulation of how the material and symbolic interrelate to generate those ways of life at all. Just as it discourages attempts to significantly transform political organizations, so too does his “radical reformism” paradoxically discourage attempts to transform the economic sphere.

There is an acute irony in Habermas’ endorsement of systems theory. A thinker whose ambition has been to overcome false objectivisms and their political correlate, technocracy, actually ends up consigning large parts of social reality to those very falsehoods. That being the case, Habermas (*TCA*, I: 251) cannot justly claim to have “de-dramatized” Weber’s antinomical dynamic between political and entrepreneurial elites and their administrative machines or to have escaped the dead-end of philosophies of consciousness.³³ Despite his argument for the co-originality of private and public autonomy, in Habermas, as in Weber, the state and its administrative bodies are predominately “machine-like,” their instrumental structures as impervious to conscious intervention as those of the economy. In the incongruous union of “radicalism” and “reformism,” it is therefore “reformism,” deference to “complexity,” which finally wins out. Absent throughout is the genuinely radical thought that the division between *Zweckrationalität* and *Wertrationalität* might itself be suspect, that Weber’s depiction of large-scale organization is at fault.

4.III.ii.) The Enduring Significance of Strategy and Risk

In place of Weber’s monist account of the “iron cage,” where all spheres of life petrify under the pressures of instrumentalism, Habermas offers a dualist vision which nonetheless fails to contest the key assumptions of Weberian theory. But the problem is not simply one of Habermas paradoxically surrendering the radical elements of his project. For in questioning Habermas’ bifurcation of lifeworld and system we are forced to question its underlying rationale, that is, the desire to separate strategy from communication. We saw that Habermasian critical theory rests on the claim of having avoided reducing reason to instrumental reason, the error of philosophies of consciousness (Ch 3.I.). Strategy, action governed by the criterion of success, is “parasitic” upon communicative action and therefore

³² I owe this point to Professor Russell Keat (personal conversation), but see also Barnes (1995: 213-215), Leet (2002: 27), and McCarthy (1991: 133).

a politics defined primarily in terms of consensual mutual understanding (*TCA*, I: 288). In pointing to the entwinement of civil society with social power, we have already suggested the empirical implausibility of this view. Here we argue that this attempt to side-step Weber encounters two further obstacles. Because strategic action cannot be rendered derivative to communicative action and because “hybrid” forms of interaction have an irreducible practical salience, Habermas fails to confine strategy in the way he wants. Furthermore, he gives inadequate recognition to those pressing moments when communicative reason runs up against intractable limits, when action must be undertaken under conditions of staunch dissensus and at the risk of destabilizing conflict.

Grave doubts have long attached to Habermas’ “parasitism thesis.”³⁴ Appropriating Austin’s philosophy of language, Habermas maintained that perlocutionary or strategic actions only succeed on account of egoistically masquerading as illocutionary or communicative acts. However, as Apel (1995: 275) has argued, this only applies to *concealed* strategic acts, certainly not to those strategic acts whose goal is immediately and deliberately apparent. In such cases speakers *openly* declare their goals without deceptive intent, hearers being apprised in full as to what is at stake. A minimal reliance on the validity claims of truth and sincerity is presumed, but the aspiration to consensus is here replaced by offers of cooperation and compromise or threats of sanction which hearers assess in terms of their individual and collective ends. Habermas claims that such language use is ultimately an egoistic “borderline” case of “normatively authorized” commands, that is, imperatives backed up by communicative reference to mutually redeemable validity claims.³⁵ But this “borderline” status hinges upon an ambiguous deployment of the concept of understanding. Habermas can subordinate these speech acts to action oriented to mutual understanding because he reads understanding exclusively in the *maximal* or *emphatic* sense, in terms of reaching consensual agreement on matters for the “same reasons” (Ch 3.I., 3.II.). Openly strategic action, however, does not presume such understanding; it presumes the *minimal* sense of comprehending what is said. Consequently, strategic rationality does in truth exhibit an internal form of understanding and this understanding is underpinned by an everyday mode of reflection, that of goal consciousness and goal maximization (Apel, 1999:

³³ Indeed, he admits as much: “It may be that “linguistically generated subjectivity” [lifeworld] and “self-referentially closed system” are now the catchwords for a controversy that will *take the place* of the discredited mind-body problematic” (*PDM*: 385, my italics).

³⁴ See, for example, Alexander (1991: 64-69), Apel (1999: 283-284), Culler (1985: 135-137), Outhwaite (1994: 47), Rasmussen (1990: 38-41), and White (1988: 45-46).

283). Habermas' assimilation of openly strategic acts to communicatively authorized commands works on account of performing a misleading slight of hand.

Accepting this, it becomes clear that the parasitism thesis fails to hold, since openly strategic acts do not logically depend upon speech-acts oriented to consensual mutual understanding. However, this does not mean that strategic action is independent from communicative action, indeed quite the reverse. This is because orientation-to-success and orientation-to-understanding are in fact irreducible *aspects* of most social actions (Barnes, 1995: 212). Forced by repeated criticisms, Habermas (1991a: 240) has eventually conceded that illocutionary and perlocutionary acts are not opposed in a subordinating relationship but *necessarily* occur together. Understanding, even in its maximal sense, is as much concerned with success and effects as effects and success are concerned with understanding. Asking someone "Could you close the window?," to use Culler's (1985: 137) example, is simultaneously a communication and a wish to alter the world, to produce an effect.³⁵ Moreover, the will to success and the will to argue on the basis of validity claims can occur within one and the same sequence of actions. "In a complex action context," Habermas accepts, "a speech act that is directly performed and accepted under the conditions of communicative action can at the same time have a strategic position at *other* levels of interaction" (*TCA*, I: 295; 1991a: 291). Political oratory, for instance, represents a "hybrid" case of action in which the strategic goal of persuasively securing votes or support combines with a communicative intention of setting out policy. A similar ambiguity occurs within attempts to "indirectly" bring about understanding. In such cases, Habermas admits, speakers seek to "shock" listeners into recognizing something previously ignored by "inferentially working up perceptions of the situation," that is, by deploying rhetorical tricks, irony, sarcasm, emotive appeal (*TCA*, I: 288, 331).

It is essential to be precise as to the repercussions of this argument. It would be a mistake to dismiss Habermas' *intention* in sharply differentiating strategic and communicative action, for his goal is to illuminate the difference between unoppressive and oppressive interactions, normatively enriched power and power premised solely on strength. In defending his distinction between justified and *de facto* legitimacy we, too, have relied on a distinction between legitimate power and brute strength. However, our argument here suggests that the distinction between oppressive and unoppressive interactions does *not*

³⁵ "The bank-robber's demand, sanctioned by his 'Hands up!,' belongs to those borderline cases of a manifestly strategic usage of speech acts ... [dependent on] the conditions under which normatively authorized demands ... can be used" (1991a: 239; 1985: 111-112).

correspond with that between strategic and communicative action. Whereas concealed strategic uses of language constitute *in principle* a parasitic manipulative relation, openly strategic acts need not, especially when it is by no means clear that these acts are indeed egoistic, since offers of cooperation and compromise or threats of sanction may be motivated by completely altruistic intentions. Furthermore, not only does Habermas' parasitism thesis fail, but conceptually and in real action contexts strategy and communication stand *interlinked*. But if there is no unambiguous way by which to separate the two, then Habermas' foundational opposition between purposive and communicative reason appears in the same questionable light as his lifeworld-system bifurcation. Just as the lifeworld-system dichotomy relies on an ontological division of reality into free and fallen realms, so too does the opposition between communication and strategy presume a pure reason that is normatively imbued and one that is thoroughly amoral. The intricacy of real action contexts is thereby masked by a reductive theoretical construct.

We will return to the opposition between purposive and communicative reason when considering Arendt's contrast between *poiesis* and *praxis* and MacIntyre's notion of "practice" (Ch 6.II., 7.II.i, 9.III., 10.I.ii). Our point here is that *most* actions have strategic and communicative dimensions which will be differently accented in different circumstances. This does not entail a rejection of Habermas' intersubjective turn or the theoretical gains secured by his account of identity formation and legitimacy. Weber's monological conception of the subject gives rise to an equally monological instrumentalism where political endeavour can *only* be conceived in coercive terms. Against this, it is assuredly true that speech oriented to mutual understanding is basic to human life, for without it that life is impossible. Thus there must be *some* political situations in which it has primacy. Yet there are *others* where strategy and an adversarial orientation, conceived now not in monological but intersubjective terms, that is, as engaged in by subjects whose identities are intersubjectively generated, is politically appropriate. In subordinating strategic to communicative action Habermas conceals this possibility, seeking instead to render strategy derivative and thus to contain its risk. Yet the effect of this turn is to exclude from view pivotal crisis moments where risk, the necessity to pursue policies and ends *without* the fully legitimating support of consensus, cannot be contained but has to be embraced.

³⁶ Hence the implausibility of the claim that we can "clarify the structure of linguistic communication without reference to structures of purposive activity" (*TCA*, I: 293).

By way of illustration we can defer to an example of intractable conflict employed by Habermas himself, the abortion controversy. Because both sides of this controversy have until now “good, perhaps even equally good, arguments,” abortion presents itself as an apparently incorrigible moral problem, one made all the more impassioned by being inextricably tied to divergent ethical self-understandings and life-projects (*JA*: 59). For Habermas, however, the way to surpass this intractability and pre-empt the turn to non-consensual interaction is to pitch the question at “the more general level of the legitimate ordering of coexisting forms of life.” Thereby the question becomes one not of identity but of securing “the integrity and coexistence of ways of life ... under the conditions of equal rights” (*JA*: 60; 1998c: 392-393). By re-interpreting this debate in terms of equal rights, it becomes amenable to consensual argumentative resolution.

However, what Habermas ignores here is that the intractability of abortion comes not solely from divergent identities but from the divergent ways in which these identities *comprehend* the concept of moral right. Pro-life advocates extend the right to life to the foetus, regardless of stage of development; pro-choice campaigners resist this extension, usually limiting that right to developed fetuses. Here ethical conceptions of the self impel contradictory conceptions of human rights, which means that any attempt to secure “coexistence of ways of life” will inevitably involve heated contention. Recourse to moral rights discourse is no solution, for what is at stake is divergent understandings of these same rights. Thus, even with the most selfless will, it is possible for actors to come to *argumentative stalemate*. The “hybrid” processes, mentioned by Habermas, by which actors use rhetoric to “inferentially” kick-start mutual understanding can and commonly do work the other way round. From an initial moment of genuine communicative intent, actors subsequently find themselves at loggerheads over issues of recognized general significance. Communication, in other words, has led not to the *transcendence* but rather to the *entrenchment* of disagreement. Although procrastination remains an alternative, the pressure of *temporal urgency*, the need to act, under which practical existence stands means that outcomes must be determined through action, through the rendering of an informed yet contested decision.

Sometimes a solution can be found via compromise or negotiation, as Habermas proposes with his notion of “fair bargaining” governed by rules “indirectly” derived from the “discourse principle” (Ch 3.II.). But this solution faces two serious difficulties. First, disagreements arise not only over substantive outcomes but *also* over the procedures leading to these outcomes. Thus, the rules for “fair bargaining” might themselves be vigorously

contested. Second, when fundamental interests are at stake, actors are likely to reject bargaining in favour of a majority vote. Contesting the ideals and goals of opponents who “know” themselves to be in the right, they simultaneously act strategically and communicatively: strategically insofar as the rhetorical conflict with words directs itself against the rhetorical arsenal of their avowed opponents; communicatively insofar as those in conflict also seek to reap further support. This hybrid form of interaction culminates in the casting of votes, signalling a halt to contest. But this halt entails winners and losers, the victors determining the legal-political landscape in which they and their opponents must now live. The success of pro-choice advocates in securing a legislative foothold for abortion means a coercively enforceable defeat of their pro-life opponents. This defeat, because it permits a course of action which the latter group finds abhorrent, cannot sensibly be construed as securing “the integrity and coexistence” of opposed ways of life, but amounts, instead, to a legislative dismissal of moral-ethical assumptions basic to the pro-life camp. And yet if there is to be movement, if abortion is to be permitted or not, such a defeat and dismissal *must* take place.

In the abortion controversy, then, the strategic attitude is not “contained” but is in fact a key mode in which opponents interrelate. Habermas is gravely insensitive to the complex nature of this interrelation. In line with his communicative political ideal, he (*BFN*: 179, 306) interprets majority decisions as the “interim” results of an ongoing “discursive opinion-forming process” directed towards “truth,” but neglects that this process is not solely discursive but also *adversarial*, a question of struggle and at times enmity. Indeed, the resort to majority voting stems not from a quest for “truth” but rather from the *prior* failure of this quest, the entrenchment of disagreement. It is assuredly true that majority decisions need not stand for all time, that the minority can usually return to an issue (Habermas, 1998c: 397). Yet Habermas disregards the *irreversibility* of many democratic decisions, the fact that the aborted fetuses and highways which result from legalizing abortion or rescinding environmental protections cannot be repealed. Thus, while in many cases minorities can and should live with the majority opinions, in some these opinions are so objectionable or destructive as to provoke non-cooperation and civil disobedience. Habermas would like to interpret civil disobedience as a “symbolic” mode of “rule violation” towards which the constitutional state can show “toleration.”³⁷ But in reality no polity can or does tolerate the contravention of its democratically secured decisions, since the effect of such toleration

³⁷ Constitutions stretch “to cover even the conditions for overstepping [their] own boundaries. A democratic constitution can thus tolerate resistance from dissidents who, after exhausting all legal avenues, nonetheless oppose legitimately reached decisions” (2003b: 41-42; *BFN*: 382-383).

would be to render the rule of law conditional. Whether non-violent or not, the illegal contravention of democratic decisions has to be coercively countered, the only normative question being the severity of the means used in counter-contravention.

This is not to denigrate the resort to principled disobedience, but to keep the implications of this resort in sight. The first is that with political engagement comes the risk of sometimes having to take decisions which endanger peace, disrupt solidarity, and make enemies of fellow citizens. Thus, insisting upon a pre-eminent communicative logic is both empirically untenable *and* normatively undesirable, since the challenges faced by citizens in crises moments are suppressed. The second implication is that the legitimacy of most political decisions and orders is a relative matter of *more or less*. We will return to this problem (Ch 7.III.ii, 10.III.ii, 11.IV.), but here it is essential to recognize the implausibility of Habermas' assertion that a law "may claim legitimacy only if *all* those *possibly* affected *could* consent to it after participating in rational discourse" (2001a: 116, my italics). Not only is this assertion dependent on agreements which may not be forthcoming but, as intimated in our discussion of the problem of separating "we" from "all" (Ch 4.II.ii), such a strong criterion of consensus is unsustainable, given that polities are contextually limited transgenerational projects in which "*all* those *possibly* affected," those who are not present, including the young and unborn, could not possibly lend their consent.³⁸ Habermas (*MCCA*: 92; *JA*: 163) would complain that this ignores the counterfactual role of his "ideal speech situation," its status as a guiding but unattainable corrective to everyday practice. But in admitting the unattainability of this ideal he in fact concedes the intricacy of the circumstances faced by actors who inhabit a real, as opposed to ideal, world, thus reinforcing our argument.

In Habermas, then, Weber's one-sided stress on competition and coercion is answered by an equally one-sided stress on communication and consensus. What is needed, instead, is an understanding of politics where the moments of discursive unity are acknowledged without denying the moments of radical dissension, the fact that while we must provide justifications for our opinions and deeds, these justifications frequently fail to convince. Although deeply problematic, Hannah Arendt's thought brings us nearer to this requisite perspective (Ch 7.I.i). She does so, however, by significantly departing from Habermas' preferred mode of philosophizing, his recourse to "developmental logics" and "rational reconstructions" where the "structures" of modernity are said to be defined "by ...

³⁸ See also Chambers (1995: 234), Ferrara (1999: 64), Mansbridge (1996: 51-55), McCarthy (1998: 115-153), Moon (1995: 155-157), and Rasmussen (1990: 43).

communicative action not accidentally but *directionally*, that is, in dependence on [world-historic] learning processes” (*TCA*, II: 145, my italics). Conceived in developmental-logical terms, the modern constitutional state and the co-originality of private and public autonomy presume a linearly conceived evolution of individual consciousness, which in turn relies upon a phylogenetic progression from pre-conventional, through conventional, to post-conventional societies, each stage a higher moment of reflection (Ch 3.I.). Thus, while Habermas (*TCA*, I: 67, 150-156) denies forwarding a “philosophy of history” or thinking that these developmental logical learning processes are “necessary,” it is assuredly true that his thought does conceptually presuppose an end-point to history, the triumph of communicative reason (Hutchings, 1996: 71-72). The difficulty with this view, unfortunately, is that it obscures the fact that modernity represents an achievement secured and maintained through political conflict and struggle, not solely or even primarily through consensual discourse. Looked at from the viewpoint of “developmental dynamics” or history as it actually unfolds through “hybrid” forms of interaction, the contingent origins and chance successes of modern democratic orders come to the fore.

Conclusion

Our study of Habermas is now at a close. We have shown that he draws heavily from Weber's diagnosis of modernity, but critiques that diagnosis and its underpinning assumptions in the hope of a politics defined by autonomy and solidarity. Habermas' significance consists in offering an intersubjective account of identity formation which rescues normative political evaluation from the dead-end of Weberian subjectivism, its emphasis on the inner will. This intersubjective turn also enables a recovery of the concept of justified legitimacy, thus seriously problematizing Weber's political realism and providing a foothold for a critical politics. When we come to Arendt and MacIntyre these incontrovertible gains will be repeatedly emphasized.

But Habermas can not be endorsed in full. His proceduralism, diremption of "morality" and "ethics," and understanding of the "good" have all to be rejected, since they undermine his project and threaten an ironic recrudescence of Weberian decisionism. The same, too, with his understanding of critique, wherein the manifold paths of emancipation are forced to conform to a reductive and contextually insensitive "ideal speech situation." However, it is his lifeworld-system dualism and its underlying division between strategic and communicative action which pose the greatest difficulty. Instead of contesting Weber's vision of the "iron cage," this dualism in fact reinforces it, thus surrendering vast arenas of human endeavour to "mechanized petrification." Critiquing Habermas' bifurcation of reality into free and fallen realms, we are also led to critique his privileging of communication as genuinely "political." Just as there is no realm defined by "norm-free sociality," so too is there no sphere of human activity in which conflict and struggle play an ancillary role.

To preserve what is positively significant in Habermas we therefore have to go beyond the bounds of his thought. In the following we consider Hannah Arendt's response to the "iron cage." Like Habermas she largely accepts Weber's diagnosis of modernity, but rejects his understanding of the grounds and possibilities of politics, thinking him complicit in the realities he sought to resist. In rearticulating these grounds and possibilities, Arendt provides a key corrective not only to Weber but also to Habermas. Yet her thought is not without serious problems. Some are specific, but others are shared with Habermas and MacIntyre, suggesting that behind their very different approaches and disagreements lie fundamental theoretical continuities which must be challenged.

Part II

Hannah Arendt and the Promise of Politics

Chapter 5

Introduction

Hannah Arendt presents a profoundly original challenge to Weber's understanding of politics. It is imperative from the outset, however, to recognize her distance from Habermas, not least because he claims her as precursor, a claim reinforced by Arendt scholars close to his philosophy.¹ As her "successor" Habermas can all the more easily denigrate those elements of her thought at odds with his. Thus he (*CES*: 201-202; *BFN*: 147) accuses Arendt of "dogmatism," of being bound to discredited "metaphysical" modes of thought that his theory circumvents. Her ideal of politics, for one, is hopelessly nostalgic and its "rigid" separation of the political and economic "unimaginable" for modern citizens.² This nostalgia and rigidity are exacerbated on the level of theory by her distinction between philosophical and moral thought on the one hand, which are guided by criteria of rational truth and non-contradiction, and opinion and judgement on the other, which alone are political. By this unhappy distinction Arendt denies herself the cognitive criteria by which to critique instances of oppression in the lifeworld. Although we have shown his own theory to be highly problematic on that specific count (Ch 4.II, 4.III.i), Habermas is confident that his lifeworld and system dualism and theory of argumentative discourse avoid Arendt's errors. And yet, despite these criticisms, he praises her for recovering the distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis* that yielded the basis for his distinction between communicative and instrumental reason. She is celebrated, too, for re-conceptualizing the "generation" of power along communicative lines, even if this re-conceptualization failed to account for "structural violence" or strategic action.³ By effecting these two conceptual innovations, Arendt provided a roughly adumbrated, albeit idiosyncratic, impetus to what would, Habermas (1977: 4; 1980: 128) declares, become in his hands the regulative ideal of "a common will" formed in "communication directed to reaching agreement."

However, this corrective appropriation of Arendt is in many respects a misappropriation.⁴ Real bonds certainly do exist, both emphasizing intersubjectivity, the equality of speakers, the centrality of freedom, and the interrelated dangers of welfare-state clientelism and a mass representative democracy that transforms politics into a "tremendous

¹ See, among others, Benhabib (1996a: 199-203), Bernstein (1983: 217-223), D'Entrèves (1994: 26-28, 152-155), and Wellmer (1997: 46).

² Habermas (1977: 14-15). It is ironic that he should criticize her for dichotomizing "political-practical activity and productivity" when he adheres to a similar construct.

³ Habermas (1974: 286; 1977: 16-18). Again, this reproach rings hollow, given our criticisms of Habermas' unsuccessful attempt to subordinate strategy.

business concern” dominated by private interests.⁵ This shared “platform” is, after all, our reason for grouping them and MacIntyre into a broad, yet diverse theoretical front simultaneously drawing from and yet trying to elude Weber’s pessimistic vision (Ch 1.III.). It is also the basis for the critical theme of our study, that they fail in significant respects and for similar theoretical turns to fully break beyond that vision. But it is a further, important goal of our study to show the distinctiveness of each and why, largely because of their disparity, each might nonetheless represent a *partial* advance upon Weber. Therefore, and profound similarities notwithstanding, by no means can Habermas be said to understand intersubjectivity, equality, freedom, or “mechanized petrification” as Arendt does, their areas of overlap being complicated by deep discontinuities signalling her enduring originality.

Most obvious is her distance from Habermas’ partisan modernism, indeed temporal partisanship of any variety. He understands the transformation of the 18th century bourgeois public sphere as a betrayal of modernity’s promise, steadfastly believing that modernity represents an incomplete or unfulfilled project. This philosophical-political identification with modernity contrasts sharply with Arendt’s condemnation of the bourgeois age as the era of “the Social,” one necessitating redemption rather than fulfilment. We shall explore why she came to this view, but here it is enough to note that Arendt thinks modernity inherently tragic, a momentous event of forgetting our humanity.

A prominent and saving exception, however, is the occurrence of modern revolutions. Arendt’s passionate, if qualified, celebration of modern revolution reflects not some underlying progressive view of history in a Habermasian developmental-logical sense, but instead a conviction that even in “dark times” the contingent world of politics guided by no historical logic still leaves room for freedom and action. It also reflects her unwillingness, in spite of modernity’s inherent tragedy, to privilege one era to the exclusion of others (*BPF*: 97; *EU*: 52; *OR*: 162). In contrast to Habermas’ idealizing endorsement of the 18th century public sphere and, conversely, MacIntyre’s outright hostility to all things modern, Arendt makes equal use of ancient Greek and modern sources and events. Her “nostalgia” is, then, of a plural, historically diverse sort, while theirs in being single-mindedly dedicated to one time remains caught within a single political horizon. In refusing such constraints she ironically turns Habermas’ charge of rigid nostalgia against him and secures for herself a distinct advantage. Because theoretically committed to seeing rationalization in both its lifeworld and systemic forms as an intrinsically progressive development, Habermas cannot

⁴ As argued by Canovan (1983: 108), Villa (1996: 67-72; 1999: 143), and Brunkhorst (2000: 182).

⁵ See (*STPS*: 222-235; *OT*: 17). It is worth noting that Arendt (*CR*: 192) considered the young Habermas “one of the most thoughtful and intelligent social scientists in Germany.”

easily, unlike Arendt, call for a turning back of rationalization (Dunne, 1993: 206; McCarthy, 1982: 70-73). Thus, whereas his thought remains tied to progressive Enlightenment philosophies of history, and MacIntyre's to a pre-modernist narrative of doom, hers is free to range over the whole course of Western civilization, allowing her to imaginatively embrace, for instance, both Aristotle's understanding of *praxis* and Kant's theory of judgement.

Arendt's simultaneous disavowal of modern progress and pre-modernist doom mirrors further dissimilarities. Foremost among them is her suspicion of deontological theories and their emphasis on justificatory discourse. As we will see, in place of deontological morality Arendt strives towards a distinctly political ethic drawing less from a principle of universalization than the capacities for promising and forgiving internal to action, friendship, the faculty of judgement, and the thoroughly perfectionist ideal of a dignified, cultured life. Understanding the latter *aesthetically*, in terms of the quality of what *appears* in the common world and its *meaning* for how we understand ourselves, Arendt endorses a "cultured humanism" which owes more to Cicero and his heirs, Montesquieu, Lessing, and Tocqueville, than to the Enlightenment quest for philosophic certainty underpinning Habermas' "rationalist humanism."

Behind this difference lie fundamental methodological and ideological discrepancies. Arendt's account of politics proceeds *phenomenologically*, letting the phenomena "shine forth," rather than *reconstructively*, that is, endeavouring to read history or language counterfactually as a rational development governed by valid discursive criteria. To appreciate the phenomenon of politics one must look to political experience itself and refuse the authority of pre-given categories, theoretical or everyday. Arendt's mode of philosophizing therefore runs directly contrary to Habermas' attempt to derive an authoritative blueprint of discourses and their domains of application. This attempt, she argues, entails a Platonic remodelling of politics in accordance with abstract theory and threatens not only to distort the realities of political life but also to pre-emptively close off its potentialities, not least the fact of "natality," the human ability to begin the heretofore unimagined.

Furthermore, while Habermas' Kantianism is of a straightforwardly progressive, rationalist kind in its concern with formal procedures and presuppositional absolutes, Arendt's thought, because it encompasses often disparate and conflicting phenomena, lies consciously between the poles of radicalism and conservatism, capitulating to neither (*BPF*: 95-104; Heller, 2001: 31-32). Arendt's circumvention of inherited political categories comes

from her insight that politics is not solely a matter of discursive questioning and answering decided by rational means, but an unpredictable, fragile activity wherein different perspectives and realities continually intersect, demanding at certain moments radical change and at others moderation and care. Extolling the free capacity to begin anew and alter the world as quintessentially part of the human condition, she nonetheless condemns the *hubristic*, wildly progressive dictum that “all is possible,” this modern superstition having paved the way for totalitarianism. Arendt, therefore, desires *balance*, a delicate, vulnerable interrelation of careful preservation and free action, and it is this interrelation that yields, in the act of founding a republic in concert with others, her novel answer to Weber’s abandonment of political legitimacy to the fickle will of charismatic rule.

The issue is not merely one of methodology or their position along the spectrum of political ideologies, but also has to do with what they prioritize in political life. Where Habermas privileges discourse, consensus, and a unified post-conventional consciousness, Arendt privileges action, dispute, and plurality (Canovan, 1983: 109). She privileges action because political life is about speaking *and* transforming the world, deciding how it should look. In Arendt politics is granted an ontological supremacy absent in Habermas, to the effect that action becomes the very mode by which a “common world” comes into being. A consequence of this supremacy is that citizenship limited to discursive interaction or *opinion-formation*, as is the case with Habermas’ “twin-track model,” entails an abandonment of authentic politics, which instead demands full participation in *decision-making*, literal self-rule (Wellmer, 2000: 238-239). Arendt’s conception of political agency and citizenship is thus far more radical than the Habermasian conception, demanding not just access to “wild” and “anarchic” informal public spheres, but also a reorganization of the formal public realm and government. This insistence on formally constituted, durable participatory institutions partly explains her profound ambivalence towards “civil society” and “new social movements,” which she thinks as much a danger to as an expression of genuine politics.

Arendt privileges dispute and plurality because the contest of opinions is the life-blood of politics. For Arendt political life is a site of uncertain diversity and change. It would, admittedly, be unfair to accuse Habermas of ignoring dispute and plurality, especially since his “ideal speech situation” is presuppositionally organized around the contest of argumentative claims among plural speakers. However, the very idea of a regulative ideal speech situation, its hypothetical assumption of a moment of perfect communication, and the attendant, non-hypothetical demand that consensus be achieved, imply that what interests

Habermas is not plurality and distinctiveness but their *overcoming*. The theory of communicative action presumes that there exists a true end to debate and that disagreement is negative, corrosive of the polity. This is exemplified by Habermas' (*BFN*: 166) repeated insistence that participants *must* agree on moral-political matters for the *same* reasons, these reasons being solely those in congruence with post-conventional identities. Thus, although offering a nuanced exploration of the monotonicity of mass "public opinion" (*STPS*: 236-250), Habermas comes uncomfortably close to Rousseau's "general will," which instead of facilitating plurality actually entails the suppression of difference.⁶ Arendt (*EU*: 436), by contrast, rejects assertions of a true end to debate, declaring, with Lessing, that in politics the truth can never be known and that attempts to prove otherwise through "compelling argumentation" constitute subtle forms of coercion. Instead, she wishes to conjoin equality and distinction in a political realm held together not by a common will or belief that we all think alike but by the recognition that we share a *world*, a recognition resting less on rational proofs than on promising and faith. Politics is therefore a risk, a fragile potentiality nourished by contingencies that no theory can determine or ensure.

Whether she gives full expression to this risk will be a focus of Chapter Seven, especially insofar as it relates to her attempted, anti-Weberian exclusion of violence and strategy from the essentially "political." For now it suffices to recognize that Arendt's thought does not equate with some prototypical and inferior theory of communicative action, as suggested by Habermas. Indeed, a key argument of the following is that she is in many, but not all, regards his superior. Her understanding of the uniqueness, contingency, and frailty of political life and its dependence on vulnerable webs of relationships held together by storytelling, that is, existential narratives of who we *are*, opens up a vision of politics far richer than that allowed by Habermas' proceduralism and subordination of the "ethical." Rejecting his insistence on purging theory of substantive ideals or goods, she also avoids cutting herself off from the orienting ideal of her politics, that of *humanitas* or of a cultured existence and mode of appreciating the world. Furthermore, Arendt's radical critique of modern mass society goes far beyond his timid critique of monetary sub-systems in spurning capitalism as a thoroughly nefarious mode of social organization. In this and her political perfectionism she is closer to MacIntyre, although her anti-teleological conception of action and suspicion of civil society and local community as *the* locus of political action significantly complicate their relation.

⁶ For Arendt's critique of "public opinion" and Rousseau as "tyrannical," see (*OR*: 76-79, 221-228).

However, Arendt's response to Weberian politics is not without serious internal shortcomings. One stems from her "performative" conception of action, which in sidelining the concepts of "goals" and "consequences" has the unfortunate effect of distorting the activity of politics, rendering its content and purpose mysterious. The reason for this distortion is Arendt's overriding, aesthetic concern with "meaning" and how action appears to the spectator, a concern encouraging her to overlook how action is and must be regarded by the actor. A second failing relates to political ethics and her answer to Weberian decisionism. In spite of her hostility to subjectivism in all its forms, we will see that her understanding of reflective judgement does not escape subjectivism but, in fact, presumes a continued endorsement of its central categories: spontaneous freedom versus predetermined necessity, indeterminate reflection versus determinate knowledge, autonomous judgement versus heteronomous action. That these categories endure strongly suggests that Arendt remains bound to worn conceptual paths. Furthermore, because she understands judgement from the retrospective viewpoint of the disinterested spectator and because, too, she implicitly assumes an ethical Archimedean Point, something she explicitly denies in her critique of modern philosophy, her theory of ethics falsifies the realities of ethical existence, which is intrinsically a matter of prospective action, and the dynamic yet ever historically bound ways in which ethical change comes about. Reproaching philosophers for mistaking theory for reality, Arendt herself ends up endorsing a speculative absolute, the myth that there can be a "privileged position." Although very different, her political ethics does not, then, represent a sufficient advance upon Habermasian morality.

These shortcomings peculiar to her philosophy compound shortcomings shared with Habermas and MacIntyre, that is, their exclusion of violence and strategy from the essentially "political" and their related bifurcation of politics into free and fallen realms. Like them, Arendt begins with Weber's diagnosis of modernity, accepting it for the most part, but rejects his "solution" of a politics founded upon a monopoly of force and elite domination. This rejection has the beneficial effect of showing Weber's conception of the political to be hyperbolically bloody-minded, that politics is *not* simply a matter of domination. But it inverts this error and goes too far in excluding coercion, struggle, and antipathy from the horizon of authentically political activity. That strategy and coercion cannot be excluded from politics is attested to even by Arendt's own thoughts on power, discriminating judgement, and the foundational act of constituting a republic. Only by recognizing the interwovenness of friendship and hostility, it will be argued, can the full reality of political risk be understood.

Moreover, as with Habermas and MacIntyre, it will be shown that Arendt's antinomical "Dual-State" ideal, where administrations fulfil socio-economic functions in radical separation from participatory fora devoted to "genuinely" political concerns, perpetuates Weber's symbiotic antinomy of the "leader" and "machine," the former category now being occupied by "self-selected elites" sprung from the people. Her thought therefore fails to ask whether Weber was correct to frame the relation of administration and politics in antinomical terms, whether his understanding of modern organization and genuine political *élan* was wrong to start with. This failing is exacerbated by her relegation of the socio-economic to the level of pre-political "necessities" that require fulfilment but which are in no way the objects or ends of "free" political action. Although Arendt promises a politics where gifted citizens might escape the deadening apoliticism of late modernity, her exclusive ascription of the social and economic to administration renders her vision far less radical than it otherwise might have been. More seriously still, this ascription runs directly counter to her critique of modern technology and technological thinking. Denouncing technocracy or the modern instrumentalization of politics, she paradoxically ends up endorsing a technocracy of her own. In the end, then, the most political of our three critics of Weber, one supremely sensitive to the problems and aspirations unique to political life, provides us with a perspective that is both deficient and in some respects dangerously misleading.

Chapter 6

Bearing the Burden of Our Times: Arendt on Modern Oblivion and the Promise of Politics

“If philosophers ... were ever to arrive at a true political philosophy they would have to make the plurality of man, out of which arises the whole realm of human affairs ... the object of their *thaumadzein*” (Arendt, 1990: 103).

To understand Hannah Arendt’s challenge to Weber we must first understand what she called “the burden of our times” (Ch 6.I.).¹ This burden emerged with modern capitalism and technological thinking, which in mistaking “necessity” for “freedom” contributed to “world alienation,” the rise of the “Social,” and the deterioration of active existence into the passivity of *animal laborans*. Here Arendt recalls Weber’s “iron cage,” yet she accuses Weber of perpetuating those currents leading to the destruction of the “common world.” One current is the glorification of violence and sovereignty feeding on an “instrumentalist” conception of political life wherein fellow actors become disposable means to fickle ends. (Ch 6.II.). Coupled with modernity’s hubristic veneration of History and Nature, this instrumentalized politics proved fertile ground for totalitarianism. Arendt’s analysis of modernity therefore goes beyond Weber’s “iron cage” to incorporate what she calls “the iron band of terror” (EU: 344).

Arendt answers totalitarian terror with a political vision revolving around “performative action,” friendship, and the faculty of judgement (Ch 6.III.). As the opening quotation indicates, the wonderment impelling her thought is the dignity of a world manifesting the unique plurality of interdependent human beings. Politics’ redemptive promise is the possibility of mutual endeavour and freedom without denigrating “worldly culture,” without succumbing to Weber’s decisionism, and without domination. This promise became real with the advent of modern revolutions (Ch 6.IV.). Celebrating their appearance, Arendt believes they reveal an important distinction between socio-economic matters and those truly germane to politics. Hence her “Dual-State” ideal where administrative bodies provide the socio-economic necessities of life and deliberative fora the basis for a free politics. Fearing bureaucratic domination and Weber’s antinomy of leader and machine, Arendt insists that these two tasks and realms be kept separate, since a free polity derives its legitimacy not

¹ *The Burden of Our Times* (London: Secker & Warburg) was the title given *The Origins of Totalitarianism* when first published in England in 1951.

from instrumental efficiency in satiating men's needs but from the free event of founding or "constituting" a republic in the company of one's equals.

6.I.) Worldly Culture, World Alienation, and the Rise of the Social

Arendt's concern is the authentic political life (*bios politikos*), a life of "worldliness" or "worldly culture." For Arendt "worldly culture" is simultaneously a political and aesthetic term. Politics and art are intimately intertwined because both concern human existence under its most "useless" aspects, when inherently meaningful and not an instrument to external ends or goals. Understood phenomenologically, the intertwining of political deeds and art inheres in their similarly intense "publicity" or appearance within a common world. Without this intense "shining forth" in a public realm there would be no reality, no sense of others or ourselves.² In presuming full appearance, art, politics and their respective criteria, "beauty" and "glory," are inseparable, for "without beauty ... the radiant glory in which potential immortality is made manifest in the human world, all human life would be futile and no greatness could endure" (*BPF*: 218). Art, in other words, preserves "meaning," which arises from the actions and thoughts of men, and this "meaning" is the foundation of human reality, the "world" itself.

Arendt understands the concept "world" in two interrelated ways. In the first it means the "human artifice" of things and objects that relate and yet separate human beings, thus providing an objective home for their shared life. The physicality of walls, meeting places, and objects grants people an *objective*, tangible "in-between" or common frame of reference in which they are "inter-ested" and which survives their short life-spans (*HC*: 182). A concern of all and incorporating political fora, galleries, marketplaces, theatres, universities, and courtrooms, the world is that space within which human beings meet and interact.

In this world contrasts sharply with *self*. By self Arendt means both our biological self, driven by the needs of the body, and our psychical self, that undisciplined "chartless darkness" of emotional urges accessible only through introspection (*OR*: 194). The *subjectivity* of the body, its urge to satisfy itself in consumption, and of the soul, its location in inner recesses, are "unfit" for disclosure in the world. They are unfit because they reflect our "animality" or demand that we substitute a mercurial inner existence for a tangible worldly existence with others.³ Contemptuous of romanticism, psychoanalysis, and modern philosophy of consciousness, Arendt sees the celebration of subjectivity as symptomatic of a loss of culture and politics. Particularly "pernicious" is the age-old identification of political

² Appearance, "being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves --- constitutes reality" (*HC*: 50). On Arendt's phenomenology, see Dunne (1993: 88-97), Luban (1994: 90-95), Taminiiaux (1996: 216-220), Moran (2000: 306-316), and Kateb (2000: 137-139).

freedom with the solitary freedom of the will, which led Weber to identify politics with sovereign mastery and inner charisma (*BPF*: 162-165). In opposition to the inner self, world and culture coincide because they must be shared and endure. Enduring, this objective frame relates human beings to each other by drawing them out of the intimacy of the family and the privacy of the self. Without a durable world in this relational sense, “there would be nothing but eternal recurrence, the deathless everlastingness of the human as of all other animal species” (*HC*: 96-97).

The second meaning of “world” is the *intersubjective* “in-between” which “overlays” the human artifice. Arendt means by this the “web of human relationships” generated by the convergence of “innumerable perspectives” through speech and action (*HC*: 183-184). Here world means neither things inherited from the past or produced in the present, nor physical space, but rather those past and present deeds of human beings that inform and continue to inform their interrelation. In their interactions human beings display their defining characteristic, the ability to begin something new. This condition of “natality,” the ability to “insert ourselves into the human world,” re-confirms the unique novelty accompanying each individual birth (*HC*: 176-177). Insofar as the web of relationships nurtures this ability, it secures human dignity, for dignity corresponds to human uniqueness.⁴

Yet dignity is vulnerable to destruction, a vulnerability having become all the more urgent with modernity’s fateful confusion of the discrete activities constituting the “*vita activa*,” the active life. Against Weber and Habermas, modernity does not signal a world historic differentiation between spheres the ancients held to be one. Instead it signals a momentous movement of *de-differentiation*, the divide between distinct spheres and activities undergoing dramatic erosion. Reaching back to Greek antiquity to recover ontological *balance*, the truth “that each human activity points to its proper location in the world,” Arendt arrives at a philosophical anthropology incorporating the activities of *labour*, *work*, and *action*, as well as the conceptual pairs of *private* and *public*, *nature* and *culture*, *necessity* and *freedom*, by which to judge our modern condition (*HC*: 73).

As the constituent activities of the *vita activa*, labour, work, and action form a hierarchy whose criterion is the degree of freedom, self-containedness, or human uniqueness exhibited by each activity, action occupying the highest position. A matter of consuming and begetting, labour (*ponein*) serves the condition of earthly life (*zoe*), by which Arendt means

³ “The passions of the soul are not only body-bound, they seem to have the same life-sustaining and preserving functions as our inner organs” (*LM*, I: 35).

⁴ Again art and politics coincide, for if beauty is “an end in itself because all its possible meaning is contained within itself,” so too does “man’s dignity demand he be seen ... in his particularity ... without comparison” (*LKPP*: 77).

the fertile “metabolism” of the body with an abundant nature (*HC*: 98). This life is swayed by a necessity that never finds satisfaction because it lies within the eternal, ineluctable *process* of hunger and consumption. Here entities and individuals give way to “development” and “function,” the immense cycles of life, death and rebirth swallowing up the particular. Futile, in labour what appears is never the human person but merely his *subjective* physical and emotional needs, *animal laborans*.

Labour differs radically from work, which encompasses fabrication (*poiesis*) and art, in the broad sense of instrumental or technological skill (*techne*). Arendt’s examples are tool-making, sculpture, manufacture, architecture, and rulership, all those activities requiring mastery and control. Work or “making” generates the first dimension of world, the “human artifice,” and is, unlike labour, a creative activity. Through it the craftsman fabricates an artificial space between nature and human beings, ensuring the *objectivity* required for a sense of stability and continuity (1987a: 35). Governed by a utilitarian logic of purposiveness or instrumentality, work is “entirely determined by the categories of means and end,” the techniques employed by *homo faber* hinging on the belief that all matter is manipulable according to a consciously conceived image (*HC*: 143). This manipulation is inherently violent, involving the destruction of nature by a creator whose use of tools places him in the solitary position of sovereign lordship.

Governed by the ideal of sovereign mastery, the self’s will to impose itself, work has no intrinsic relation to human plurality, which Arendt defines as “the twofold quality of equality and distinction,” by which she means human beings’ similarity in being human and yet uniqueness in terms of their irreplaceable personalities (*HC*: 175-176). A gulf therefore separates *homo faber* from Aristotle’s *zoon politikon*, the man of *praxis* or action belonging in the “public realm” (*ecclesia, agora*), wherein the “glory” of men’s deeds, their meaning, shines forth. Action is the ability to spontaneously initiate “unprecedented processes whose outcome remains uncertain and unpredictable,” which Arendt identifies with freedom (*HC*: 177, 231-232). In its freedom, action escapes from labour’s natural and necessary cyclicity. It differs from work in not proceeding from a preconceived model and in presuming an irreducible *intersubjectivity*. Corresponding to the second dimension of world, “the web of relationships,” action is always “in concert” because action *is* speech.

Allocating labour, work, and action to the subjective, objective, and intersubjective dimensions of reality, Arendt believes these activities belong to discrete spheres that should be kept in equilibrium. Labour belongs in darkness, the household or *oikos*, work in the workshop and marketplace, and action in the public realm, the *polis*, where diverse persons meet. But through processes of *world alienation* or *subjectification* caused by fundamental

shifts in knowledge and the rise of “the Social,” modernity destroyed this equilibrium (*HC*: 313; *BPF*: 61). Nature and culture having been rendered indistinguishable, the distinction between freedom and necessity was lost, leading to the loss of politics as man’s true mode of freedom and the perverse belief that it is by labouring or serving bodily necessity that humanity becomes free, the ascendancy of *animal laborans*.

Here the similarities between Arendt and Weber are striking. In line with his (*SV*: 155) observation that “the ultimate and sublime values have retreated from public life” into the privacy of intimate relations and romantic fantasy, “world alienation” denotes for Arendt the loss of a common sense of reality, and therefore of identity and shared meanings, which throws individuals back upon their subjective inner life. It does not mean that the world has ceased to exist, but rather a radical change in our existential attitude initiated by the modern “flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self” (*HC*: 6). Arendt’s understanding of this dual flight recalls Weber’s account of the disenchanting movement of theoretical and formal rationalization. Galileo’s Archimedean science wished to leave the earth to attain a God’s eye view and, in using the telescope in place of the five earthly senses, substituted experimentation for wondering contemplation as the path to knowledge. But when geocentric perceptions were acknowledged as false, men lost confidence in their mundane senses and began to doubt existence. Descartes’ radical solution was to turn in upon the self and introspect the mind to reveal indubitable verities. The moderns thereby concluded that knowledge could only issue from what came of man, his mind, and from what he himself has “made” through experiment. A pragmatic interpretation of science as know-how, as the manipulation of nature, was thereby born, occasioning a fundamental reassessment of man’s defining attribute. Thus *poiesis* and not *praxis*, as in Greek antiquity, became supreme.

The early modern period, the age of *homo faber*, saw its task as imitating and remodelling nature. This remodelling hinged upon *homo faber*’s technological prowess, but there was a decisive difference to this remodelling from earlier use of the tool. This difference had to do with the central term of the new science, the idea of *process* that had usurped the old position of Being. Conceptually, process implies becoming over Being and presumes fluid instability as opposed to permanence and durability. Thus *homo faber*’s ascendancy was doomed from the start because this creature dedicated to producing a realm of stability within which human beings can live had, in placing process above product, surrendered stability to flux, to the natural cycles of *animal laborans* (*BPF*: 59, *HC*: 307).

This surrender of stability also coincided with a surrender to subjectivity. The problem with *homo faber*’s utility criterion is that it degrades all things into means to ends and these

ends, in turn, into means to further ends, *ad infinitum*. Because nothing has worth apart from its “usefulness” and “usefulness” itself has no “use,” meaninglessness results (HC: 154-158). To escape this cannibalistic logic, *homo faber* is forced to regard the user as the sole “end-in-itself” (1987a: 37). But if man is the “measure of all things,” then nature, world, culture, and politics lose their intrinsic worth and degrade into mere vehicles for the expression of man’s subjectivity. The objective reality of world and culture therefore reduces to man’s internal life, the body and “dark heart” of *animal laborans*.

Scientific endeavour also underwent fundamental alteration, slipping from pre-modern *contemplation* of nature to early modern *imitation* of natural processes, and then finally to actual *interference* in these processes. This third stage of initiating processes in nature culminates in the ability to unleash nuclear forces and to radically alter the developmental course of the body (HC: 148-149). Science and technology no longer conceive themselves strictly in terms of fabrication, which properly culminates in a product, but have melded fabrication to aspects of *action*, the ability “to start new unprecedented processes whose outcome remains uncertain.” Arendt thinks this a madly Promethean turn, for action properly belongs to the human “web of relationships” where promising and forgiving, as we shall see, keep its uncertainties in check (HC: 238). Protruding onto nature, action loses these checks and thus becomes gravely unpredictable, even to the extent that the scientist might not know when he is destroying himself and humankind as a whole.

Labour, work, and action have, then, been perilously confused. Initiated by modern science and technology, this confusion was compounded by the rise of “the Social.” Arendt uses the term in at least four senses to denote the public organization of economic goods or the *social-as-economic*, 20th century *mass* society, 18th century *good* or “polite” society, and, finally, *discriminating* or “parvenu” society. Each sense contrasts negatively with her notion of the “political,” either because it refers to non-political aspects of human existence or poses a threat to the capacity for political action. The social-as-economic and mass society are especially important as they correspond to the two aspects of Weber’s “iron cage,” that of “mechanized petrification” and hedonistic consumerism.

By the social-as-economic Arendt means a society “in which ... mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance,” in contradistinction to antiquity, which ascribed labouring to the *oikos* (HC: 46). No matter what is done, it is typically done for the sake of material well being. The origins of the social-as-economic lay, as Weber maintained, in the Reformation. Stirred by an “innerworldly asceticism” that excised “care for or enjoyment of the world” and “whose deepest motivation” was “worry and care about the self,” the reformers initiated processes of accumulation which,

expropriating the Church and then the peasantry, gave birth to capitalism (*HC*: 251, 254). The deprivation of certain groups' "place in the world and their naked exposure to the exigencies of life," expropriation entails the loss of property, the "elementary political [pre-] condition for man's worldliness" (*HC*: 253-255). Although denoting "privation," lacking the opportunity to appear publicly, the private also has an irreducibly positive aspect. The private-as-property, the "fences around the houses and gardens of citizens," grants the individual psychological shelter, a home (*HC*: 72).⁵ Driven by burgeoning cycles of accumulation, capitalism fatally undermined this shelter. Instead wealth, fluid capital, became the orienting ideal and because fluid denied the expropriated a locus for the formation of worldly identities. They were thrown back on themselves and what they experienced in being thus thrown was, as with introspection, the brute necessities of their bodies.

Automation, the transformation of *homo faber* as craftsman into superfluous *animal laborans*, furthered this tendency. When "work specialization" succumbed to the "division of labour," the creativity associated with work gave way to the functional "qualitative equivalence of all single activities" (*HC*: 123). Production was therefore transformed into an accelerated, quasi-natural movement (*HC*: 153). This movement, in turn, led to an unprecedented abundance of worldly goods, resulting in their conversion from durable objects into consumables. Captivated, Marx believed this proliferation a dialectical unfolding of "man's metabolism with nature." He was thus led to celebrate labour as mankind's defining attribute. This revolutionary elevation of labour meant animal life itself became the "end" of human endeavour, understood now as the realization of man's "species being," which, embodied in a collective "class" subject, would culminate in "socialized mankind" (*HC*: 89). Marx's communist "utopia," wherein all groups and all property have been absorbed, is not at all utopian but the realizable fulfilment of capitalist expropriation.⁶

The logic of expropriation appals Arendt, just as it did Weber, because when reduced to animal functions human activities cease to be attributable to single men in their uniqueness.⁷ Governed by the homogenizing imperatives of "national economy," the state, or rather "welfare-state," becomes an all-encompassing "family" defined by one perspective and the way is secured for property to succumb to the absurdity of "collective ownership" (*HC*: 28-

⁵ Implicit in Arendt's (*HC*: 254) argument is Marx's distinction between *use* and *exchange* value.

⁶ (*CR*: 211-215). Indeed, capitalism and socialism belong to a single continuum encompassing the early bourgeoisie, the birth of the welfare-state in Bismarck's reforms, and pointing to the possible ascendancy of a classless society.

29, 321). Absurd because “ownership relates to what is my own by definition,” but nonetheless attainable, collective ownership reduces politics to the “administration of things” (CR: 137-138). Because the social-as-economic presumes just one perspective, politics becomes the servant of one interest and such service presumes bureaucracy, what Arendt famously calls the “rule of Nobody” and the most tyrannical form of government insofar as “no men, neither one nor the best, neither the few nor the many, can be held responsible” (CR: 137-138).

The fundamental import of the social-as-economic is, then, a confusion of activities and a blending of public and private culminating in the extirpation of freedom. Dissolving the bonds of family and the space for appearance, the social engulfs the entirety of human existence to generate mass society and its “normalizing” conformism (HC: 40). Emerging from the destruction of the European class system, mass society denotes two transformations of worldly life. First, the ability to act gives way to passive behaviour because society recognizes only “status” and in 20th century mass society the only status recognized is one’s function or “job,” as exemplified by Adolf Eichmann (HC: 41; 1959: 48-51). Not a fanatic but a dutiful family man, Eichmann was led to his crimes out of a will to advance within SS bureaucracies born of experiences of unemployment and loneliness caused by post-WWI economic dislocation. Typical of mass-man’s homelessness, his lack of a secure position in the world, and loneliness, his having become an “atomized individual,” Eichmann’s inability to judge or speak beyond the mumbling of clichés signalled his utter immersion within much broader processes of massification (OT: 318; EJ: 47-49).

Yet mass-man also owed his appearance to the “philistine” bourgeois. Hence the second transformation effected by mass-society, its debasement of culture, world, nature, politics and truth into “values” or “commodities that have no significance of their own but ... exist only in the ever-changing relativity of social linkages and commerce” (BPF: 32, 204). The bourgeois appreciated others as currency by which to trade favours and, in subordinating art to the self’s social betterment, corrupted culture, which “insofar as it contains tangible things --- books and paintings, statutes, buildings, and music” should encompass and testify to the glories, the stories, of past civilizations (BPF: 203). Instead, when internalized, the “good,” “right,” and “beautiful” ceased to be intersubjectively meaningful categories, their worth now being their “value” to the individual alone and not to men in their plurality.⁸

⁷ We should note, however, that Arendt’s understanding of “function” and “socialized mankind” does not correspond with Habermas’ normative understanding of “function” and “socialization,” but rather to the Habermasian ideas of “latent functionality” and “systemic integration” (Ch 4.I.i, 4.III.i).

⁸ Good, for example, became a value exchangeable with “those of expediency or of power. The holder of values can refuse this exchange and become an “idealist,” who *prices* the value of “good”

But it is by subordinating all values to the “prime” value of mere life (*zoe*) that the social-as-economic finally drives the social-as-mass to its nihilistic extreme. Even if not immediately connected with making a living, culture is enslaved to life as *entertainment*, as a consumable to be devoured by jobholders seeking transitory diversions from the rhythm of labour. Arendt’s fear, then, is the same as Weber’s. She fears the ascendancy of a social form reducing politics to administration and debasing culture into sensuous gratification. With him, too, she argues that this social form exhibits a disenchantment brought to fruition by science, bureaucratic rationalization, and capitalism, although these came not from differentiation but from de-differentiation.

higher than the value of expediency; but this does not make the “value” of good any less relative” (*BPF*: 33, my emphasis).

6.II.) Anti-Politics, Hubris, and Totalitarianism

There are notable similarities in Arendt and Weber's assessment of modern politics. Both believed existing representative democracy conduced to mediocre politicians concerned less with the true interests of state than with "horse-trading" (*PW*: 351). Both feared that without true political "spirit," the "routinizing" or "normalizing" effects of bureaucratic rule would overwhelm the opportunity for action. Both admired and yet castigated Marx, praising his understanding of capitalist economic structures and yet condemning socialism as the end point of modern expropriation. Yet this convergence veils profound disagreement. As Arendt sees it Weber is implicated in the developments he sought to resist. Lamenting the loss of freedom, his defence of capitalism nonetheless insulates the very thing that made "socialized mankind" possible. Moreover, because he understood the "iron cage" as extirpating *inner* creativity, he stands guilty of the "anthropocentrism" that drove *homo faber* to subjectify world and culture (*HC*: 157-158). Reducing politics to an internal calling, Weber frames action in terms of the self, not the world or the actor's relation to others in the world. No matter whether the actor acts responsibly or out of conviction, the criterion of his commitment is an "inner balance ... that his life has meaning in the service of a 'cause'" (*PV*: 84). Meaning is therefore internalized, which for Arendt is absurd, since meaning demands publicity, speech, and a shared worldliness.

But Weber's greatest mistake, in Arendt's view, was his perpetuation of an error initiated by Plato and definitive of the Western political tradition in general. Plato stands at the beginning of that tradition because it presupposes his substitution of work for action (*HC*: 220-230). Plato's goal was to ensure that the ignorant many would be led by the knowledgeable few who alone possessed truth. But this resulted in politics and freedom being reinterpreted as the prerogative of a single mind, the sovereign, "modelling" a polity and its people according to his inner will. Such modelling presumes domination and rulership, which, in turn, presume "strength," a quality of the individual in isolation from others and finding increase through the use of implements and instrumental violence. For Arendt an intimate connection exists between violence and rulership. Just as the household head used violence to "emancipate himself from life's necessity," so too does the Platonic ruler deploy it to render his subjects obedient (*OR*: 114). But whereas the former deploys violence where it is necessary, in the pre-political realm, the ruler introduces it into the polity and brings political life to an end.

To counter this fateful error Arendt returns to the Athenian conception of citizenship. Such citizenship is *isonomic*, involving a relation of equality between actors who in their private life enjoy unequal degrees of skill and talent. A cultural achievement, *isonomy* allows naturally unequal persons to deal with each other as co-builders of a shared world. It presumes, furthermore, that *archein*, “to begin” or “to rule,” and *prattein*, “to finish” or “to follow through,” are not separate but part of the same activity, action.⁹ No citizen could suffer domination or claim to dominate. It was only by avoiding such claims that he could excel in the company of his peers and attain a degree of immortality, for one can only excel in competition *with* others. This intersubjectivity means that the basis of action is non-sovereignty, a lack of the strength harnessed by the craftsman. Accordingly, Arendt deems power a pure actuality existing only when equal people act in common. The basis of all government, power drives the political realm and is, by implication, the well spring of meaning. And because politics has inherent worth, so too does power. Whereas violence is always “instrumental” to some higher goal, power, because the condition of political engagement, comes into being as an end-in-itself (CR: 150). A matter of vocal togetherness or *relation* rather than *command*, it is more a mode of existence than a means and cannot be possessed by any individual alone.

The contrast with Weber is stark. Power is to him “the probability that *one* actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his *own will* despite *resistance*” (ES: 52, my emphasis). Weber does recognize natality, since prophetic charisma is the revolutionary motor of rationalization, but Weberian charisma is thoroughly inimical to the plurality and equality characteristic of Arendtian natality. When he extols competition, he understands it as the interplay between factional *leaders*. Other actors are necessary to the leader’s success, but this necessity is envisaged negatively, entailing the “intellectual proletarianization” of followers --- since the “apparatus” must blindly obey --- and the leader’s inevitable complicity in satisfying his underlings’ “base” material and emotional desires (PV: 99, 125-126). Both follower and leader are tainted by the relationship of power but that taint defines politics. Notwithstanding his break with natural law and classical liberalism, then, Weber remains solidly “traditional” in carrying forward Plato’s separation of *archein* and *prattein*, with the *Reichspräsident* winning out over bureaucrats, revolutionaries and the mediocre mass.

⁹ “Far from being connected with justice, as in modern times,” equality “was the very essence of freedom: to ... move in a sphere where neither rule nor being ruled existed” (HC: 33). The difference between *isonomy* and modern egalitarianism is that the latter presumes a natural equality where the uniqueness of the person is reduced to sameness.

Defining political activity as the deployment of the means of violence, Weber generalized *homo faber's* mute means-end mentality beyond the realm of work with the effect that action became a question of coercively maximizing benefit and minimizing harm. For Arendt this usurpation of speech by command is thoroughly *anti-political* (CR: 155). Admittedly, when Weber wrote that the actor must contract with “diabolical powers” and accept that “the attainment of “good” ends ... pay[s] the price of ... morally dubious means,” he meant to condemn the moral absolutist whose disregard for consequences would lead to *greater*, as opposed to *lesser*, evil (PV: 122). For Arendt, however, this condemnation is itself no less deadly than absolutism.

Her critique issues from her understanding of action. Unlike work, which always has a definite end, the distinguishing mark of action is to have no conclusion. When we act we insert ourselves into the world, but the consequences of that insertion always remain unknown. Accordingly, actors do not lord over their activity, but are non-sovereign *doers* and *sufferers* whose deeds are both “boundless” and “irreversible” (HC: 190). But if *praxis* is inherently unpredictable and if no one can ever foresee the outcome of their deeds, then means-end calculation is “ruinous” precisely because such calculation assumes we know the conclusion, which is impossible (MDT: 147). Indeed, in politics it is the “means” or our present performance that counts and not some hypothetical end-state, there being no way to ascertain whether the killing of an innocent will save many innocents or whether it might result in innocence ceasing to be a protective barrier to atrocity.¹⁰ Far from protecting us from greater evil, the doctrine of the lesser evil actually threatens to lead us to it.

To counter this murderous instability Arendt endorses the principle that “the concern of one is the concern of all” (EU: 284). But there is a further reason for that endorsement. When nothing lies beyond consequentialist calculation --- and Weber recognizes no limit except success --- then any end can become acceptable.¹¹ This surreptitious effacement of limits enabled totalitarianism, a uniquely modern form of rule. Arendt's encounter with totalitarianism, a refugee in 1933 and briefly interned by the Vichy regime in 1940, is the core experience unifying her inquiries into culture, politics, and modernity. Unlike Popper or Marcuse, she does not think totalitarianism the direct consequence either of anti-liberalism or liberal instrumentalism. Dependent on the chance collapse of Western mores precipitated

¹⁰ “Every good action for the sake of a bad end actually adds to the world a portion of goodness; every bad action for the sake of a good end actually adds to the world a portion of badness. ... whereas [in work] ends are totally dominant over means, just the opposite is true for acting” (MDT: 148).

¹¹ Weber (PV: 121-122) denounced the Zimmerwald revolutionaries as “cosmic-ethical rationalists” for wanting to prolong WWI so as to realize a socialist economy which they knew could not be

by mass society, its arrival was as contingent as any other political event. However, even if Plato and Weber did not cause the “iron band of terror,” they did indirectly facilitate it. Their instrumentalization of politics constituted one step in a series that, including science’s Promethean pretensions, gradually lent credence to the attempt to remodel humanity according to the “suprahuman” absolutes of History (Stalinism) and Nature (Nazism) (*OT*: 465-466; *EU*: 283).

Crucial here was the birth of modern “historical consciousness.” As with the new science, this consciousness pictured history as a great over-arching process, the “whole,” time’s progression from the infinity of the past into the infinity of the future, rather than particular events, now considered the purveyor of meaning. Thus man’s “dignity” was interpreted as conformity to an immense pattern of species development which, as a law of “Progress,” would culminate in the end of History or Nature.¹² Mirroring natural science technology, this self-imposed conformity was conceived as a form of making, of forcing men to be what development “dictated.” The “science” of History therefore gave rise to social-scientific techniques for manipulating man as pliable matter (*BPF*: 59). The result was a technicization of politics premised on the belief that men do not act but behave, the backbone of modern ideology, which functions by reducing reality to the deductive unfolding of a single absolute: that the proletariat are History’s chosen people, that the Aryans will by Nature triumph. The danger of ideology, however, is not its false absurdity. As Eichmann attests, its danger is that it might *become* true, that the attempt to make human beings pliable will render them behaving units (1971a: 418).

Notwithstanding his strictures against *weltanschauliche Politik*, Weber was not immune to ideology, for in seeking an “end-in-itself” beyond utility’s cannibalistic logic he too ends up endorsing an overawing absolute. Although rejecting the Enlightenment idea of Progress central to the adulation of History, he sustains such adulation in attenuated form by capitulating to the *Machtstaat* as “destined” to ensure the survival of the “national species” through conflict with rival civilizations.¹³ Waning during his life but never disappearing, this Darwinian conception of struggle is of a piece with those imperialist theories of race that would later yield Nazism’s conceptual core (*OT*: 463-464). The difference between the

achieved by that means. By implication, however, if that end had been achievable then they would have acted responsibly. The limits to action so conceived are entirely contingent.

¹² See (*BPF*: 41-90). Modern historical consciousness arose with Vico and was carried forward by Kant (“the ruse of nature”) and Hegel (“unfolding spirit”) until finding clearest expression in Marx. Arendt (*OT*: 463) thought Marx “the Darwin of history,” for “if one considers [their] philosophies” it turns out that “the movement of history and the movement of nature are one and the same.”

¹³ “We do not have peace and human happiness to hand down to our descendants, but rather the *eternal struggle* to preserve ... the quality of our national species” (*PW*: 16, 75-79).

impeccably unracist Weber and the Nazis was, of course, that he held firm to liberal values providing a check on the *Machtstaat*'s progress. But once these subjective values were rejected in favour of other equally subjective preferences, the limits on totalitarian remodelling catastrophically gave way.

This catastrophe was further enabled by modern large-scale organization, which drives expropriation and automation to an extreme. Situated within a vast apparatus coordinated by faceless superiors, the bureaucrat does not think himself the originator of his actions. Instead, and analogous to labourers in the modern "division of labour," he is an inconsequential "cog" whose dignity inheres in facilitating the functions of the apparatus, whatever these may be. Anonymous and subject to anonymous powers, the bureaucrat is shorn of his natality, with the result that his capacity for responsible action succumbs to a passivity perfectly suited to the totalitarian project of "perfecting" man.

The essence of such perfecting is a terror which, in merging public and private, condemns subjects to a loneliness corrosive of personal and worldly identity. Quickening the "processes" of Nature and History, totalitarian persecution executes the "objective judgements" of ideology, that this race or class is "decadent," by actually transforming races and classes into decadent categories, thereby paving the way to their "justifiable" elimination. The danger is not, as Weber's theory of bureaucracy implies, crushing stagnation, but, through expropriation and automation, an acceleration of movement such that nothing but "becoming" remains: no culture, no world, but a "permanent revolution" feeding off itself (*OT*: 389-390). This arbitrary "becoming" is characterized by a profound disregard for consequences. The Nazi practice of multiplying offices so that many bureaucracies addressed identical tasks was not a device to ensure efficiency but a hugely expensive attempt to diffuse the "will" of the leader and conceal the real organ of power, the secret police (*OT*: 417-420). That the apparatus of terror assumed priority even over regime survival meant that terror had become the beginning and end of government, regardless of repercussions (*OT*: 464). Totalitarianism is, then, the insanely hubristic conclusion of *homo faber*'s generalization, his search for an ultimate entailing the denial of utility as a sensible category, and a parody of the "lesser evil" doctrine, since it was through accepting a host of lesser evils that totalitarian functionaries were led to the greatest crime in Western history. The enormity of that crime is encapsulated for Arendt in the death camps, totalitarianism's "laboratories." In their mad unreality the camps verified the blasphemous assurance of organizational omnipotence by destroying all vestiges of spontaneous dignity. But the import of that assurance is perversely tragic. Totalitarianism assumes that man can achieve

everything and yet, paradoxically, the attempt to demonstrate this omnipotence ends in his complete reduction to a Pavlovian dog (*OT*: 438).

6.III.) Action, Friendship, and Judgement

The terrible tragedy of the Western “Tradition” is its culmination in totalitarian paradox. Arendt contends that only by understanding what was lost under totalitarianism can worldly existence be redeemed as worthy of attention. She therefore returns to the Greek *polis* not out of a desire to found Athens anew but to disclose a treasure almost destroyed, the “promise” of politics. This promise centres on the capacities for action and friendship denied by totalitarian rule.

History is not the unfolding of some logic, as modern historical consciousness assumes, but the contingent occurrence of extraordinary events throwing light on the everyday, the ordinary, and generating meaning.¹⁴ Through storytelling or narration we come to an understanding of these contingent realities, the “web of relationships” also being a web of stories. What is revealed in stories is the “who,” actors’ unique personalities. As opposed to their “what,” skills, talents, or imperfections, their “who” comes to light only in speech. Hence Arendt’s claim that drama and action stand interlinked, for both players and actors need the presence of others, an audience or fellow-actors, so that their uniqueness may show forth. Politics, indeed, is a “kind of theater where freedom [can] appear,” a self-contained activity leaving no product behind but exhausting its “full meaning in the performance itself.”¹⁵

Arendt arrives at a performative conception of action, meaningful in and of itself, to counter the instrumentalization of human beings in the service of “higher” absolutes, Nature and History. An end in itself, the glorious or memorable act exhibits a virtuosity or “excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him” (*BPF*: 153). Harmonizing world and man, virtuosity is a response to uncertain situations with the right words at the right moment. Virtuosity means that action involves struggle, an *agonistic* striving, but one, Arendt insists, conducted in the mode of deliberation, persuasion and negotiation, and requiring courage, the ability to forgo concern for oneself (*HC*: 41, 197). To believe action’s meaning inheres in its performance entails that motives, goals and consequences do not lie at its core. Motives are essentially private, knowable only through introspection, and thus have only tangential significance for public political life. Goals and purposes, on the other hand, impose one path or design and thus threaten to reduce

¹⁴ The “meaningfulness of everyday relationships is disclosed not in everyday life but in rare deeds” (*HC*: 42).

¹⁵ (*BPF*: 154; *HC*: 206). Thus in opposition to work, “this specifically human achievement lies altogether outside the category of means and ends” (*HC*: 207).

action to monological work. To view action consequentially is to confuse coercion with speech and to legitimize a false idolatry of victory and might.¹⁶ Because of its “spontaneity and practical purposelessness,” action is free only when it *transcends* motives and goals regardless of success, as the figures of Hector and Rosa Luxemburg show.

A *polis* is not the mere physical location of the city-state, but the organization of its people and their binding relationships (*HC*: 198). The only free realm, it is an institutional space of “organized remembrance” facilitating the appearance of greatness. But the public realm is a fragile achievement. Action is the most meaningful of men’s activities, the sign of their spontaneous natality, but because unpredictable this very natality can also take an horrendously destructive course, as totalitarianism shows. Action’s “enormous risks” are avoided only if men celebrate the existence of others, prize “moderation,” and exhibit *humanitas* (*HC*: 191, 245). By “*humanitas*” or “*cultura animi*” Arendt intends a mind cultivated in the appreciation of worldly culture (*MDT*: 15-30, 71-80). Exemplified by Cicero and Lessing, *humanitas* designates, first, an ability to care for and add to world. In this sense it signals an augmenting *and* conserving quality that protects the old from the ravages of time and increases its beauty by adding new art objects, thoughts, or actions (*BPF*: 213, 219). Irreducible to the Nation or *Machtstaat*, culture in this sense is a universal yet vulnerable attribute of human civilization. World preservation and augmentation depend, however, on a second, more fundamental aspect of *humanitas*. No matter how beautiful, the world remains an alien place without being “humanized” through an “incessant and continual discourse” embracing what Aristotle meant by *philia politike*, “friendship” or “solidarity.”¹⁷

A politics of *praxis* rather than purposive *poiesis* is distinguished by “being-with,” not Weber’s hostile “being-for” and “being-against” (*HC*: 180). But by friendship Arendt does not mean “intimacy” or “fraternity.” It is a subjectivist mistake initiated by Rousseau to think friendship equivalent to the closeness of intimates or the compassionate fraternity of the oppressed (*OR*: 79-95). Intimacy and fraternity are apolitical in that their overwhelming warmth closes up that “interspace” established between distinct persons in the world.¹⁸ Love and compassion seize hold of the soul and destroy the distanced relatedness pivotal to political engagement, for such engagement entails having to do with those one does not love

¹⁶ If understood in terms of success, action loses its revelatory character and becomes “no less a means to an end than making is a means to produce an object” (*HC*: 180).

¹⁷ “We humanize what is going on in the world and in ourselves only by speaking of it, and in the course of speaking of it we learn to be human” (*MDT*: 25).

¹⁸ Friendship is “a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us” (*HC*: 243).

or regard as belonging to one's group.¹⁹ When rendered political, fraternity's compassion easily degrades into pity, and pity, as Robespierre showed, possesses "a greater capacity for cruelty than cruelty itself."²⁰ Solidarity, in contrast, is often aroused by suffering but its decisive characteristic is that it comprehends both the weak *and* strong, poor *and* rich, as co-builders of a common world. Only when we engage as friends do we come to a plural "community of interest" and escape the non-worldly interest of the self or our particular group (OR: 88).

This engagement obviously implies a "political ethic." The terms "ethics" and "morality," which Arendt, unlike Habermas, uses interchangeably, take on three very different meanings in her thought, exemplified by the figures of the "good man," the "parvenu," and the "good citizen." The "good man" exemplifies *morality-as-conscience*. Rarely of political relevance, morality means here the internal accord between "me" and "myself," as when Socrates declared it would be better that "multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, *being one*, should be out of harmony with myself."²¹ Arendt understands by morality-as-conscience Kantian practical reason, whose incongruence with the world is acute. At the centre of practical reason lies the idea of an utterly autonomous being who gives the law to himself. His criterion is not speech, but the logical demand that the "will" concur with the dictates of reason. The will's self-imposed commandments are guided by a monological absolute, the categorical imperative, which runs counter to the "fundamental relativity" of the "interhuman realm" by constraining the infinite particularities of human life under one determinate, universal law (MDT: 27). By raising this law and noumenal "Man" above "men," Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* stands guilty of "inhumanity," of eclipsing world, culture, and natality under the shadow of a sovereign internal will. Bound to the thinking ego in its solitude, Kantian conscience is driven by an hubristic concern for the "integrity" of the private self regardless of the needs of others or the world and oblivious to the terrible connotations of "*Fiat iustitia, et pereat mundus*" (BPF: 228).

Politics and morality-as-conscience are therefore fundamentally distinct. For the individual-qua-self what matters is internal harmony, yet this harmony is too subjective, too anarchically idiosyncratic, to be a basis for plural interaction and remains genuine only in the

¹⁹ (MDT: 12-17). Love and compassion *are* authentic, yet they belong in the realm of privacy where they do not transform into dangerous "sentiments" (HC: 238-242; 1978b: 246-247).

²⁰ (OR: 89; 1978b: 247). Weber and Arendt concur here, but whereas she rejects compassionate goodness because its realization renders the world violent, Weber rejects goodness precisely because the world *is* violent.

private sphere (CR: 64-66). Like Weber, Arendt fears the violence that can follow from absolute conviction.²² In the sense represented the “parvenu,” however, Arendt means by morality and ethics those behavioural conventions --- “mores” or “ethoi” --- by which actors become respectable, “normalized.” These conventions are the “social” equivalent to the private deontology of the “good man.”²³ Transmitted unreflectively over generations, this Kantianism for the “little man” subsumes reality under existing custom and law. The problem with respectability is that it invites not reflection but a fetishism of “duty” compatible with rival, even perverse, sets of conventions. When exacerbated by social crises, this fetishism is used to disastrous effect by demagogic movements preaching new social “moralities.”²⁴

Arendt, therefore, wishes to overcome the radical subjectivism of morality-as-conscience, prone as it is to idiosyncrasy and violence, and the deadly banality of respectability, which can lead ordinary men like Eichmann to heinous crimes. Her alternative to the dualism of subjective will and social conformism, which can be likened to Weber’s antinomy of charisma and passive functionality, is the figure of the “good citizen” (CR: 62). This citizen accepts that worldly realities must take precedence over the self’s congruence with itself. Thus he resembles Weber’s (SV: 147) mature actor whose devotion to a “cause” is infused by a “feeling of responsibility” open to “inconvenient facts.” But, as we saw (Ch 1.II.), Weber’s ethic of responsibility is entirely subjective. The actor’s “cause” may demand that others be taken into account or it may not; what matters is that it is *his* cause, that *his* life derives sense from it. There exists, then, an acute paradox in Weber’s (PV: 125-126) claim that “he who seeks the salvation of the soul ... should not seek it along the avenue of politics,” for the only measure he has of politics is precisely the actor’s soul. The emphasis on soul means that his demand to look to the world differs radically from Arendt’s. Like Arendt, Weber is fully aware of action’s contingency, that freedom brings into being and is a response to the unexpected. But the risk of politics stemming from other actors’ natality is to him a frustrating obstacle (HC: 235). Hankering after an illusory

²¹ Arendt (1971a: 439) quoting *Gorgias*. The “good man” is not selfish, but unworldly, willing to sacrifice the world and himself for what he thinks is right.

²² Dwelling on Melville’s tale of Bidly Budd and the evil Claggart, Arendt is convinced “that absolute goodness is hardly any less dangerous than absolute evil” (OR: 81). See also Camus (1956: 297).

²³ A perverse equivalent, Arendt (EJ: 135-137) admits, insofar as it denies Kant’s ideal of independent thinking, but one reflecting key aspects of his second *Critique*, not least the subsumption of experience under a determinate absolute.

²⁴ “People get used ... not so much to the content of the rules ... as the possession of rules under which to subsume particulars. How easy it was for the totalitarian rulers to reverse the basic commandments of Western morality --- “Thou shalt not kill” in the case of Hitler’s Germany, “Thou

sovereignty, Weber's mature individual stoically accepts the realities of a base world out of a resigned honesty to himself. Arendt's actor, in contrast, loves the world because it is only in the world that he can be free among his peers. Freedom, contra existentialism, is thoroughly intersubjective, the natality of others not primarily a threat but a joyous condition of action preserved by *philanthropia*, a "readiness to share the world with other men" (*MDT*: 25).

The "good citizen" concerns himself neither with respectability nor his soul but with the endurance of the common world, which is a gift, a home, never a burden. His opinions arise not in silent discourse with himself but through dialogue with others, just as the "moral code" internal to action, the faculties of promising and forgiving, depend on the existence of others.²⁵ This plurality is constitutive of reality, because it is only by engagement in the web of relationships that the real and the illusory can be determined. Since it is a condition of being human, the web of relationships can never be escaped. But it can be damaged, as when the parvenu blindly subsumes reality under ideological absolutes or when the good man, attending to his soul, claims to know what is definitively true or right. The citizen, however, accepts the existence of other opinions, that he does not possess definitive truth, and believes that whether an evil damages his soul is immaterial, for what matters is whether the world is damaged (1987b: 47-48). Arendt gives a suggestive example. In the mode of the good man, the "conscientious objector" declares "This, *I* cannot do," fearful of doing something that he will not be able to live with (*CR*: 63). "Civil disobedients," by contrast, organize together for a common objective, declaring, "This *we* will not do." Whereas the former is guided by personal will, the latter are bound by explicit public agreements resting on a constitutive plurality (*CR*: 98). Theirs is not the expression of a subjective viewpoint intent on moulding the world according to an inner image, but an open declaration to uphold shared political principles clarified by publicly examined opinions and directed towards altering or maintaining institutional bonds. They realize, in other words, that protective boundaries arise and are preserved only through political organization. Caught within his subjectivity the good man was powerless to stop totalitarianism and the parvenu actually aided it, but if there had been enough good citizens they would have prevented atrocity by organizing politically (Canovan, 1992: 178).

shalt not bear false testimony against thy neighbour" in the case of Stalin's Russia" (1971a: 435-436; 1979: 313-314).

²⁵ We return to promising below (Ch 6.IV, 7.I.i, 7.III.ii), but it is crucial to recognize that for Arendt (*HC*: 237) promising and forgiving "correspond so closely to the human condition of plurality, [that] their role in politics establishes a diametrically different set of guiding principles from the [solitary] moral standards inherent in the Platonic notion of rule," morality-as-conscience.

It is the faculty of reflective judgement (*Urteilkraft*), of discerning “this is beautiful, this is ugly, this is right, this is wrong,” Arendt claims, that enables man to escape his subjectivity.²⁶ In his second *Critique* Kant fell into “inhumanity” but in the *Critique of Judgement* he gave voice to a genuine political ethic. Arendt turns to Kantian aesthetic judgement because it promises to avoid reducing reality to the dictates of the inner will, the categorical imperative, or to the imperiousness of knowledge (truth, fact) which underpins Plato’s separation of *archein* and *prattein*. Both involve compulsion, the will compelling itself to be lawful, the cognitive intellect (*Verstand*) compelling assent through sensuous intuition or logical self-evidence.²⁷ Both are also “determinate,” subsuming reality under universal rules or laws. Judgement, by contrast, works the other way and is “reflective” inasmuch as it is not a matter of knowledge but of interpretation or understanding, of arriving at a general meaning or concept after having reflected upon circumstances which, because contingent, are irreducible to universal laws.²⁸ Presuming a disjunction between the realms of fact and meaning, Arendt’s account of judgement therefore mirrors her account of action. As with action, judgement is concerned with meaning, which implies that one judges not in accordance with instrumental success or goals (fact) but in terms of an event’s unique import, its performance. This gives rise to “opinion” which, in opposition to truth, is persuasive and seeks to “woo” the consent of others.

The basis of judgement is non-cognitive *taste*, an immediate, discriminating feeling of pleasure or displeasure. Seemingly idiosyncratic or subjective, taste is rendered non-arbitrary by the imaginative process of “representative thinking,” whereby the judge distances himself from his private idiosyncrasies by taking the possible opinions of others into account. The ability to assume this “enlarged mentality” Arendt calls “common sense” (*sensus communis*) (*LKPP*: 69-72). Whether one’s opinions are genuinely enlarged, appropriate or right, depends on whether they are publicly communicable or, like envy or greed, must be hidden from sight. This emphasis on publicity highlights the key difference between Weber’s (*PV*: 115) “sense of proportion” and Arendtian reflective judgement. Both demand openness to reality, the forgoing of customary rules and clichés to appreciate the complexity of new constellations, but reflective judgement is an intersubjective rather than an individual faculty, since an enlarged mentality “presupposes the presence of others”

²⁶ (*LKPP*: 15). The judging “historian [is] the inquiring man who by relating it sits in judgement over it ... [and reclaims] human dignity ... from the pseudo-divinity named History” (*LM*, I: 216).

²⁷ “Truth is what we are compelled to admit by the nature either of our senses or of our brain” (*LM*, I: 61).

(LKPP: 74). Yet --- and this will be crucial for our subsequent critique --- although Arendt (1971a: 446) calls judgement “the most political of men’s faculties,” it is not an attribute of actors, but rather of *spectators* who are “present” only to other spectators. “Withdrawal from direct involvement to a standpoint outside the game” being the “*sine qua non* of all judgement,” only “disinterested” and inactive onlookers who play no part but simply delight in the spectacle can, in considering each others’ opinions, attain the impartial distance requisite for proper judgement.²⁹ The citizen, by contrast, is wedded to his part or role in specific circumstances and cannot come to awareness of the general meaning or import of his deeds. Whereas action is heteronomous, always conditioned by the acts of others, spectatorship is “unconditioned” and “autonomous,” a transcendence of the game or “the web of relationships,” albeit temporary (LM, I: 70-71).

²⁸ This general meaning inheres in an “exemplar” adequate to the new phenomenon, as when the particular figure of Bonaparte gave rise to the more general concept “Bonapartism,” which is “valid for more than one case” (LKPP: 85).

²⁹ (LKPP: 55, 68-69). The actor-spectator split is a vexed issue, Arendt sometimes coalescing the actor and spectator perspectives, sometimes severing them. However, as her thought progressed this divide became increasingly pronounced. See Beiner (1982: 89-156), Bernstein (1986b: 221-237), Benhabib (1996a: 172-198), Hutchings (1996: 81-101), Villa (1999: 87-106), and Yar (2000: 1-27).

6.IV.) A Political Politics

It was Arendt's judgement that the "organized oblivion" of totalitarianism is but one part of the modern age. Reconfirming natality, and in direct antithesis to totalitarianism, the other "innermost meaning" of the modern age is the fateful story of *revolution*. The American Revolution and the revolutionary bodies that sprang up suddenly in Paris 1871, Russia 1905 and 1917, Germany 1919, and Hungary 1956, show that, defeats notwithstanding, "political *élan* has not yet died" (HC: 217). These events inaugurated a new form of government, council democracy, born not of violent frustration but of a grass-roots urge to found a stable public realm. Brought into being by the people, not by revolutionary elites, the wards, councils, soviets or *Räte* were limited to no one class but characterized by a plurality of classes, from the workers to the intelligentsia, and rested on an equality that did not level difference or distinction, but presumed a non-ideological commitment to public participation.

Without such plurality politics degrades into the rule of cliques.³⁰ Because freedom "means the right "to be a participator in government," or it means nothing," Arendt equates this rule of cliques with a denial of the "political" (OR: 218). In this the councils contrasted favourably with "revolutionary" parties, the Jacobins and Bolsheviks. Weber argued that the deterioration of the councils into hierarchical parties was inevitable, that they were doomed to become machines (PV: 100, 125-126). Arendt, on the other hand, believes no transformation took place, but rather that the parties usurped and destroyed the power of the councils, placing in their stead an ideological apparatus, as is proved by Robespierre's proscription of the *sociétés populaires* and Lenin's crushing of the soviets.³¹ The result, "dictatorship resting on the exploitation of mass emotionality," was therefore not at all inevitable, but the tragic outcome of a contest between two antagonistic organizational ideals (PV: 107).

There is, nevertheless, a further reason for the triumph of parties. When the councils failed, it was sometimes due not to party antipathy but to a fundamental confusion on the part of council members as to the object of their endeavour (OR: 273). Their error consisted

³⁰ This applies as much to representative democracy as to non-democratic systems. Liberalism upholds private liberties, but these important barriers to injustice are maintained at the cost of surrendering natality to representatives who hold a monopoly on political life and pander to the sectional interests of an apolitical electorate (OR: 252, 269-270).

³¹ (OR: 240-41, 255-258). Weber had himself participated in the 1919 Heidelberg Workers and Soldiers' Council. His bewilderment ("Who, I'd like to know, is in charge here?"), recounted by Jaspers (Arendt, Jaspers, 1992: 338), was proof for Arendt that he had little inkling of a non-dominative political order.

in mistaking freedom for *socio-economic* and *juridical liberation*. This distinction between freedom and liberty underlies Arendt's "Dual-State" ideal of "political politics," which stipulates a sharp separation of strictly political and strictly administrative matters, in contrast to Weber, who would see political leaders dominate the machine.³² On one side there is an "elementary republic," giving vent to political passions and devoted to genuinely public questions; on the other, a hierarchical administrative apparatus whose organizational criteria are managerial competence and proficiency. The resulting gap is unyielding insofar as it draws from her basic dichotomies of culture versus nature, freedom versus necessity, *polis* versus *oikos*. In Athens laboring was confined to the *oikos*, the realm of women and slaves, who, tied to life's eternal recurrence, could never gain the status of citizens. Arendt does not mean to justify slavery or female domination, yet she is certain that behind these unjust practices lay a genuine intuition, that the "economic" concerns necessity and has in itself nothing to do with culture or freedom (Levin, 1979: 524-525).

Arendtian freedom concerns the vocal ability *to* engage and participate with others in matters of common significance whose status is uncertain and thus amenable to debate. Liberty, by contrast, is liberty *from* despotism and *from* hunger, necessity. Whereas the foundation of freedom is truly political, securing an enduring house for action, liberation is a pre-political condition of *praxis*, immensely important to be sure, yet not free in that it does not and cannot presume equal actors engaging in concert. The routes to freedom and to civil and economic liberty are therefore distinct.³³ Civil, juridical liberation *may* be secured politically, that is, through persuasive speech, but more often than not violence is employed and violence presumes technical expertise used for the benefit of subjects who remain largely passive. Related to the natural condition of life, economic liberty can *only* be secured technically.³⁴ In *The Human Condition* Arendt speaks of the social-as-economic as an aberration, yet in subsequent writings, *On Revolution* and *Crises of the Republic* in particular, she accepts it as a given whose intrinsic problems, poverty or "the Social Question," must be addressed but which also have to be kept from invading politics. By way of illustration, she cites Lenin's "entirely unMarxist" admission that the goal of struggle had been "Electrification *plus* soviets." Arendt takes him as meaning that economics and politics are separate and that poverty, "the state of constant want and acute misery," falls under the

³² "Dual-State" is my term, but it adequately reflects Arendt's intention.

³³ Liberation can be "fulfilled under monarchical ... rulership, ... [but freedom] necessitates ... the constitution of a republic" (OR: 33).

³⁴ Because labour entails being "enslaved by [a] necessity ... inherent in the human condition," it is "quite doubtful whether the political principle of equality and self-rule can be applied to the economic sphere" (HC: 83-84; OT: 498).

remit of an expert administration having the skill to solve it (*OR*: 60, 65). Politics, the establishment of a new body politic, cannot help here because when social problems such as wage levels, “electrification,” and production are at issue, people find themselves caught within private and group-specific interests or needs that prevent the articulation of worldly or common interests. Because “enlightened self-interest” is a corrupting falsity, it is to the expert, the controller of politically *neutral* machines and techniques which “neither prescribe nor preclude any specific form of government,” that we must turn to discover a determinate common interest where social matters are concerned.³⁵ Despite her profound worries as to the dangers of bureaucracy, for Arendt the arbiter of social justice is not the citizen but the apolitical technocrat.

A more fundamental reason, however, for the socio-economic’s pre-political status is its being a question of cognition or knowledge and not of *opinion*. “There are,” writes Arendt, “things where the right measure can be figured out ... things [that] can really be administered” and need not, indeed should not, be debated (1979: 317). These things are givens, the natural necessities of life. To use her example, experts can know for a *fact* beyond all discussion how large an apartment must be for adequate living. However, what is debatable is whether apartment blocs should be used to further racial or class integration, whether integration is a politically wise course. Politics comes into being only when matters are indeterminate, uncertain, which is not a feature of economic-administrative questions.

Contrary to some interpretations, Arendt does not call for some “night watchman” administration.³⁶ If hemmed in by legal controls and kept apolitical, welfare-state administrations are best positioned to halt the processes of expropriation by ensuring that “the masses, dispossessed by industrial society in capitalist and socialist systems, can regain property” (*CR*: 214). Regaining this pre-condition of political life is administration’s goal. If politicized, however, chaos ensues. Arendt’s controversial contrast of the American and French revolutions illustrates this point. Because America enjoyed a natural abundance unknown in the Old World, “the Social Question” did not trouble the Founding Fathers, who properly concerned themselves with the outline of the new republic, its constitution. The French case was very different, its attempt to enshrine freedom soon foundering on the social conditions of the Old World. Overwhelmed by the spectacle of extreme poverty, the French let themselves be driven by pity to think their prime goal not the erection of a durable

³⁵ (*OR*: 65; 1987a: 32) “Self-interest, when asked to yield to ‘true’ interest --- that is, the interest of the world as distinguished from that of the self --- will always reply, ‘Near is my shirt, but nearer is my skin’” (*CR*: 175).

³⁶ Habermas (1977: 15), Mommsen (1989: 70), and Wolin (1994: 295) note Arendt’s exclusion of social justice from political debate, but fail to note the welfare role accorded to administrations.

political realm but the alleviation of misery. The private, bodily need of the poor thereby entered the political realm and in its urgency destroyed the class-transcending solidarity emblematic of action. In its stead came a celebration of violence as the servant of necessity.³⁷

Under the baleful influence of party elites most subsequent revolutions have taken inspiration from the French experience. Sadly the councils were not immune. Here Arendt draws a distinction between *revolutionary* and *workers'* councils. As in the Hungarian Revolution, which gloriously reconfirmed the significance of council democracy, the former remained political throughout until crushed by police and military force. The latter, however, saw their role as social, as the reorganization of factories. This blunder meant that proper management was drastically hindered, giving the council principle an undeserved bad name, and that "revolutionary" parties came to be seen as the sole alternative, if only because their hierarchical structures resembled those of management (*OR*: 274-275).

What the workers' councils forgot was the need for boundaries. Radical and yet cautiously conservative, Arendt's "Dual-State" ideal places limits on politics and economics in the hope of preserving them both. The disastrous course of Western politics is due precisely to a faith in unlimited power mistaking freedom for sovereignty. Weber's centralized state dominated by a president who enforces order is a case in point. Although he (*PW*: 305) called for constitutional checks on the *Reichspräsident*, so that the "the gallows [would be] the reward awaiting any attempt to ... govern autocratically," these are of a wholly negative kind and do not amount to a dispersal of power among citizens but its concentration at the centre. Such monopolization is perilous because once one concedes the legitimacy of sovereign rulership one also concedes the legitimacy, in supposed emergencies, of the decision to overstep constitutional checks (*OR*: 151).

To counter unbounded rule, Arendt imagines political legitimacy as resting on the event of constituting a republic. Her paradigmatic constituting event is, again, the American Revolution. The word "constitution" has a two-fold meaning, denoting both a document and a beginning, the act by which a people constitutes itself as a political entity (*OR*: 203). Initiating a new departure, the Founding Fathers opened a glorious gap for the relative "immortality" of the public realm and culture (*HC*: 55-56; *LM*, II: 210). More than beginning, however, they also tried to preserve the freedom they experienced in acting by rendering it "objectively" tangible as written law. In the idea of foundation, therefore, the

³⁷ "Violence justified and glorified because it acts in the cause of necessity, necessity no longer rebelled against ... but ... faithfully worshipped as the great all-covering force which surely, in the words of Rousseau, will 'force men to be free'" (*OR*: 115).

radical and conservative currents of Arendt's thought coalesce, for to constitute is both to begin *and* to conserve that act in the basic law of a polity.

Arendt is acutely aware, nonetheless, of two paradoxes in the attempt to conjoin revolution and preservation. The first concerns the tension between beginning and conservation, freedom and foundation (*OR*: 223-224). To act is to begin spontaneously, to break with the past and to disrupt order. Paradoxically, however, the founding act is a free act that nevertheless shackles all subsequent action by laying down a body of law that will become a *restrictive* "past" for future generations, the founders' freedom becoming tangible at the cost of the freedom of their successors. Spontaneous freedom and stable foundation seem, therefore, to conflict and point to the inevitability of coercion, "This far and no further!," in the origin of a polity.

This conflict between foundation and freedom is exacerbated by a second paradox, the "unconstitutional" authority of founding acts (*OR*: 160-162). A constitution purports to be the source of all authority, yet the derivation of its own authority appears wholly mysterious. An eruption in "temporal time and its continuity," the founding act has no higher authority from which to legitimate itself and thus, like all beginnings, appears "to carry ... a measure of complete arbitrariness" (*OR*: 205-206). This problem Arendt terms the "abyss" of freedom, that every act, because it could have been otherwise, appears to rest on opaque contingencies. A hiatus in the chain of legitimation, this "abyss" presents actors with a dilemma. Either they content themselves with Weberian charisma, the fickle will of exceptional individuals who rule by right of superior strength, or they go in search of some transcendent authority in the form of God, Nature or History. Both paths deny the "political," the one inviting coercion, the other a sublime politics easily degenerating into totalitarianism.

In line with her "good citizen" ideal, Arendt's answer to the paradox of "unconstitutional" authority is the faculty and act of *promising*. Intrinsically plural, since a promise can only be made *between* actors, promising sidesteps coercion insofar as it secures "limited independence from the incalculability of the future" by binding actors back to a sworn "agreed purpose for which alone the promise [is] valid and binding" (*OR*: 171; *HC*: 245). By a fundamental covenant embodied in their constitution, and not by deference to any external authority, the Americans secured and justified the authority of their power.³⁸ Indeed, this legitimacy can be traced back further to the Mayflower Compact. When the Pilgrims combined "themselves ... into a 'civil Body Politick'" they erected a structure

“powerful enough to ‘enact, constitute, and frame’ all necessary laws and instruments of government” (OR: 167). Despite their many differences, they achieved this by conceiving themselves as a plural “We” based on mutual consent. Most significantly, they realized that their consenting to be a “We” housed within itself the source of political authority, the very moment of consent being what determined their polity’s form.

The beginning brought into the world by mutual promising suffices to assure the legitimacy of all that follows. It also suggests a “solution” to the first paradox inhering in the tension between founding and freedom. Only if someone begins can there be future freedom, yet this beginning must be of a specific sort to avoid its equation with violent command. True to their experience of “public happiness,” Arendt argues, the Founding Fathers alighted upon a form of law whose essence is not coercive but relational, a matter of mutual association. The act of constituting a republic generates an institutional web of relationships preserved by “*rappports*,” which spring not from philosophy, concerned as it is with generalities and universals, but from contingent speaking and doing. The significance of these legal *rappports* is that they establish an enabling connection between “two partners whom external circumstances have brought together” (OR: 187). Constitutional law is therefore “directive,” bringing institutionalized activities such as electing into being, and only secondarily, if at all, “imperative,” determining what can and cannot be done (CR: 193). Moreover, as the term “directive” suggests, a founding act and its law do not trespass against the natality of subsequent generations if they allow for augmentation and revision. Genuine authority, which derives from *augere*, to augment and increase, is a living balance between preservation and change. An inherited constitution secures freedom for those who follow and enables them to engage their “capacity for building, preserving, and caring for a world” when it admits of amendment and refuses to dictate all that may subsequently be done.³⁹ The failure to see the profound “coincidence” of freedom and preservation in the practice of augmentation, “that the “revolutionary” act of beginning something entirely new, and conservative care, which will shield this new beginning through the centuries, are interrelated,” is yet one further negative legacy of the French Revolution, which gave birth to the antagonistic but twin ideologies of liberal radicalism and romantic conservatism, both of which are premised on the anti-political belief that order comes and is enforced from above (OR: 202, 213).

³⁸ Power “applies solely to the worldly in-between space by which men are mutually related, combine in the act of foundation by virtue of the making and the keeping of promises” (OR: 175).

³⁹ (BPF: 95). “Thus ... the very authority of the American constitution resides in its inherent capacity to be amended and augmented” (OR: 202).

Chapter 7

Judging With and Against Arendt: Citizenship, Risk, and the Scope of Politics

Chapter Six set out Arendt's narrative of modernity and vision of politics. The task of this chapter is to interrogate that vision. We first explore what is positively significant in Arendt. Admirably aware of the risk of politics, its utter dependence on uncertain particularities, her account of active, substantive citizenship promises far more than Habermas' radical reformism (Ch 7.I.i, 7.I.ii). In particular the demand for a rooted institutional politics represents a laudable alternative to his prized "subjectless" public sphere and civil society.

But Arendt's thought exhibits serious philosophical shortcomings, specifically her false bifurcation of freedom and necessity, her equation of necessity with labour and nature, and her unwitting subjectivization of judgement (Ch 7.II.i, 7.II.ii). Most serious of all, however, is her elimination of purposiveness from action. A consideration of these philosophical perplexities sets the stage for a critique of her politics, which recalls our critique of Habermas (Ch 4.III.). Arendt endorses active citizenship, but her separation of the political from the social renders such citizenship highly problematic (Ch 7.III.i). Moreover, the attempt to "ontologically spatialize" reality along the lines of her "Dual-State" ideal culminates in a series of self-vitiating quandaries, not least an indirect endorsement of Weberian political realism. These quandaries are exacerbated by regrettable inadequacies in her otherwise admirable understanding of political risk. As with Habermas' failed attempt to confine the role of strategic action, Arendt's portrayal of the social as the realm of necessity and violence, and the political as that of "being-with" or non-coercive freedom, also fails and for reasons immanent to her thought (Ch 7.III.ii).

7.I.) Arendt's Significance

7.I.i.) Contingency and Risk

Supremely sensitive to the contingency of world and culture, Arendt's understanding of action and the centrality of particular events reaffirms key concerns underplayed by Habermas and, as will be argued (Ch 10.II.i), by MacIntyre. In this respect she is better able to counter Weber's political vision, for that vision claims superiority over "naive" normative perspectives precisely on account of giving contingency and risk their due. Arendt's goal, however, is to appreciate these phenomena without succumbing to political realism.

We saw how she resists the reduction of history to some universal developmental logic. Habermas' evaluative division of historical time into pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional periods is implicitly ruled out by her equal regard for Athens and the American Revolution. His presumption that modernity, despite its one-sided rationalization, is *the* age of freedom fails to take account of human natality, the fact that no one can predict the course of future events. The unprecedented rise of totalitarianism proves this beyond question. More seriously still, Habermas' ideal speech situation endorses as a regulative standard a moment of perfect communication where the "wearisome processes of persuasion, negotiation, and compromise" have been overcome (OR: 86-87). For Arendt, on the contrary, there can be no era free from the problems of politics and to presume otherwise, even on the level of counterfactuals, is to desire the end of political life and humanity's natal capacities.

The ineliminability of uncertainty, the very essence of contingency, is due to the nature of action itself. Because action's condition is plurality, every actor both affects and is affected by other actors, meaning that action alone stands out as the only activity demanding the presence of others. But the presence of others means that action is *boundless* and *irreversible*. It is boundless because every act initiates a chain of subsequent acts whose direction remains unknown, and hence no actor can tell the consequences of his deeds or those parts of the web of relationships they will alter. Arendt thus agrees with Weber (PV: 117) that the result "of political action often ... stands in completely inadequate and ... even paradoxical relation to its original meaning." Action is irreversible and therefore frequently tragic because once done, no deed can be undone. Hence the risk of politics. Our deeds may run counter to all expectation and go disastrously astray, but we must nonetheless act. Boundlessness and irreversibility together indicate why action is always frail, natality imbuing deeds with the "inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all

boundaries” (*HC*: 190). Action brings the space of appearances into being and attempts to preserve that space by setting boundaries and laws, but the active “onslaught” of every new generation threatens to uproot and transgress those same boundaries, even to the extent of destroying the public realm. To be aware of the contingency of action and its location, that it need not exist, is, then, to embrace the vulnerability of humanity’s defining attribute: that we are free to do what might otherwise be left undone.

Stressing action’s risk-ridden contingency Arendt targets the philosopher’s tendency to substitute theory for actual practice (*LM*, II: 198). Philosophers occupied with theoretical delineations of political existence are mistaken because in politics we rely not on philosophical constructs but worldly deeds. Habermas’ developmental-logical account of modern democracy is a case in point. The very *idea* of law, he claims, contains within itself the germ of liberal democratic legitimacy, the private rights of the legal subject pointing necessarily to the public rights of the citizen and vice versa (*BFN*: 31-32, 449-454). Private liberty conceptually presumes democratic rule and this rule likewise presumes liberty. Arendt distrusts this neat demonstration not because it is philosophically suspect but for what it occludes. Concentrating attention on the unfolding of a *general*, universal logic, it downplays the truth that freedom is always a *particular* attainment of specific times and places. We enjoy liberty and public participation not because of conceptual implications, but because of previous and ongoing political struggle (*BPF*: 168). In other words, what is important in politics is “developmental dynamics,” not logics.

Habermas admits the importance of developmental dynamics or historically specific “political cultures,” but this recognition takes second place to his reconstruction of discursive logics. Arendt’s thought, in contrast, prioritizes political culture in the form of the “good citizen.” Many commentators have objected to her account of “morality-as-conscience,” seeing in it a failure to adequately theorize the moral dimensions of political action.¹ To an extent this criticism rings true. Arendt’s portrayal of morality-as-conscience as a private concern for oneself ignores the truth that all morality, whether public or private, is concerned with the self’s relation *to* others, and not with the self’s harmony with itself, since others also populate the “household.” That Arendt believes her account of “morality-as-conscience” adequately describes private morality suggests she holds to a “narcissistic” conception of conscience reminiscent of Weber’s account of “inner balance.” This subjectivist conception, if it were all she had to say about morality, would end up repeating Weber’s antinomy between conviction and responsibility. However, her account of *political* morality, the

¹ See Kateb (1984: 85-112; 2000: 143), Winters (1987: 188-194), and Benhabib (1996a: 193-198).

“good citizen’s” care for the world and those in it, does point beyond this antinomy. Here the actor is motivated by a “conscience,” but this conscience recognizes its embeddedness within a world populated by others, the need to publicly examine opinions which can never claim to be definitively right, and the fragility of shared life.² Arendt’s portrait of the morality-as-conscience of the “good man” can therefore be interpreted not as a description of conscience *per se*, but as a critique of “certainty,” of the philosophic vice of assuming that theoretic rules can tame reality’s complexity, and, more significantly, of moral fanaticism, of those who do not recognize the existence of others or, if they do, refuse to acknowledge their opinions.

Supremely confident, the fanatic ignores the plurality of opinions, *the* condition of politics. But this ineluctable condition means that to prevent evil we must be “committed to political solutions to political problems ... devote ourselves as citizens to maintaining and improving the public world” (Canovan (1992: 2000), quoting Arendt). Because active intervention constitutes the sole antidote to active wrongdoing, the ground of an ethical politics inheres not in theory but in action itself. Hence Arendt’s turn to the “moral code” internal to *praxis*, promising and forgiving (*HC*: 238-243). Countering irreversibility, the fact that once done no deed can be undone, forgiving breaks the stranglehold of the past and saves the actor and the world from revenge. Countering action’s unpredictable boundlessness, a genuine political ethic rests upon actual agreements to live together, on the one hand, and agreements not to commit certain acts, on the other (*CR*: 92). This two-fold promise can only be made and upheld by citizens who, recognizing the intersubjective ground of their freedom, mutually establish the parameters of good and evil. Without such promising the rights of man are idle fancy, for only through collective endorsement do such rights come into being. The illusions of philosophy notwithstanding, natural rights and norms are not at all natural but the precarious achievement of political endeavour.³

It is inaccurate to conclude, however, that Arendt endorses a “foundationless” or proto-postmodernist conception of politics (Villa, 1996: 206-207; Canovan, 1992: 197-200). To be sure, she denies that ethical foundations exist in some transcendent realm, timeless and unchanging. Yet politics does have *worldly*, as opposed to theoretical, foundations, with Arendt’s wholly substantive image of a dignified life operating both as standard of conduct and treasured ideal. This dignified life depends on an equilibrium between equality and

² Thus, Biskowski (1993: 867-887) and Williams (1998: 937-950) are right that Arendt’s account of world, natality, solidarity, and preservation entails a profoundly rich political ethic.

distinction sustained by relations of friendship and civility. Preferring evaluative phenomenology to justificatory analysis, Arendt's cultured humanism spurns Weber's nationalist interpretation of culture to maintain a universal conception of the worth of politics, a conception which emphasizes the practical, as opposed to philosophical, nature of that worth. Although her theory of judgement unwittingly ends up endorsing a philosophical or transcendental solution to politics' problems, as will be seen (Ch 7.II.ii.), the core message of Arendt's thought is that while human dignity is assuredly real, there are no guarantees outside of particular events and actions that it will obtain.

But lack of guarantees is no reason to endorse Weberian realism. From the fact of uncertainty Weber concludes that action equates with diabolical contracts and polytheistic conflict, politics being a mere means to individual wills. Viewing other actors' natality as an obstacle, not a source of joy, what this also ignores is the narrative constitution of plural political life. Taking individual desire as its prime referent, Weber's decisionism neglects the undeniable truth that it is actors acting in *concert* who comprise politics. Being in the world is not reducible to decision or will, the stunted condition of the fanatic, but a matter of belonging to intersubjective networks reaching from the past to the present and into the future (*HC*: 184). Without embodiment in political narratives or stories this network remains inhuman and alien. But to place a political constellation into a narrative, to attempt to understand it, is to raise the question of legitimacy. This question demands that actors understand the network they inhabit as meaningfully theirs. Obscuring this "web of relationships," Weber succumbs to the Platonic myth that politics can be legitimated by an individual ruler. Even though it will be argued that Arendt mistakenly excludes coercion from the genuinely political and, ironically, is realist as regards the social, her emphasis on promise and care does function as a correcting counter-weight to dangerous fantasy of *coercive sovereignty*. Every enduring political accomplishment is a plural accomplishment dependent on the potential, implicit or active consent of others. Without this stabilizing promise and without the possibility of subsequent augmentation, which the image of a sovereign maker excludes, all effort is ultimately futile. And the possibility of augmentation depends in turn upon the key political virtue of moderation, the realization that the common world is easily destroyed when one man claims to know what is definitely right or thinks himself equal to the task of remodelling his fellow citizens. Arendt is profoundly significant,

³ Rejecting the natural law tradition from which Habermas ultimately draws, Arendt (*OT*: 290-302) concurs with Burke that rights are neither natural nor inherent in discourse, but contingent political achievements, a fact "displaced persons" learn to their cost.

then, in responding to the risk of an uncertain world not by declaring its futility but by stressing the plural care and nurture required to keep it in existence.

7.I.ii.) Institutional “Spaces of Appearance” and Substantive Citizenship

The combination of conservatism and radicalism encapsulated in Arendt’s conjunction of foundation and freedom hinges on the truth that politics come into being through the deeds of many actors. In this respect Arendt recalls Habermas’ incisive critique of Weberian *Herrschaft*, that legitimacy and authority are far more than questions of brute factual belief but fundamentally depend on unending intersubjective processes of understanding, critique, and re-constitution (Ch 4.I.ii).

Yet Arendt’s radical conservatism is certainly not Habermas’ radical reformism. For one, it does not relent before capitalist expropriation. Where Habermas has made his peace with the market, believing only in a defensive realignment of system and lifeworld, Arendt’s “Dual-State” calls for an ambitious policy of de-expropriation so that citizens might possess the property needed to counter further massification. Nor does she surrender work to system functionality. Labour is misunderstood, as will be seen, but work remains a genuinely creative activity constitutive both of the objective world and human identity. Despite her firm belief that Marxism gave succour to totalitarian impulses, Arendt is staunchly Marxist in holding to the distinction between use and exchange value, which underlies her differentiation of property and wealth (Parekh, 1979: 88-89). Furthermore, unlike Habermas’ problematic separation of ethical and moral domains, she does not distance herself from the ethical impulses motivating her theory. *Humanitas* or cultured existence constitutes the end of political activity and that end is quintessentially a matter of ethics, meaning, or identity, of who we *are* and who we want *to be*. When we act we reveal ourselves as unique human beings and this revelation confirms that “[meaningful] tragedy rather than [meaningless] absurdity is ... the hallmark of human existence” (HC: 235). Habermas desires a strict division between questions of identity and of norms so as to avoid Weber’s value-scepticism, but Arendt recognizes that the norms regulating politics only make sense with reference to the reasons why this existence is valuable at all. The totalitarian denial of dignity, its gainsaying of natality as the defining attribute and end of human beings, was the first step in the revocation of normative checks on atrocity. Ethics, the ends of human beings, and morality, the obligations protecting these ends, therefore stand and fall together.

Arendt differs from Habermas in one further respect. Where Habermas places a disempowering division between opinion-formation and decision-making, identifying the former with civil society and the latter with a largely systemic state, Arendt urges a full-blown revitalization of citizenship, a recouping not just of opinion forming competencies but also the power to *participate in* and *decide* the course of government. A prevalent interpretation of her thought is therefore seriously misleading. According to this interpretation Arendt's radically "anti-statist" politics perfectly coheres with those fluctuating new social movements appearing on the peripheries of existing governmental systems to protest and urge change.⁴ Because representative government frustrates the capacity for action, it is "only" in civil society that "public freedom [can] become tangible" (Bernstein, 1986c: 257).

There is support for this reading, even if it rests on a fundamental misinterpretation. The Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War protests indicated beyond doubt the admirable "spirit that has informed voluntary association" (CR: 98). This spirit infused groups whose purpose was not self-advancement but the betterment of a shared, public world. Realizing the joys of engaging, organizing, and striving with diverse others celebrated by Tocqueville, they challenged the tendency towards administrative "bigness" or centralization that Arendt saw as eroding political authority in 1960s America (CR: 181-184).

Yet Arendt shares Tocqueville's profound ambivalence toward civil society. The truth is that civil society has no intrinsic connection to *isonomy*, the artificial or culturally secured equality-in-difference permitting naturally unequal subjects to combine in concert. Arendt distinguishes the public realm from the social-as-economic and mass society, but she also distinguishes it from *discriminating* society. In this associative realm subjects find themselves members of linguistic, ethnic, and status groups linked by uniform standards of identity that are either given or consciously "exclusive." Bound by the non-political principles of fraternity and intimacy, these groups grant members a sense of belonging especially important in times of crisis (MDT: 13-17). In opposition to political equality, however, discriminating society is thoroughly conformist, tending towards an homogenization of difference.⁵ Whereas in politics there is a plurality of diverse, non-interchangeable actors, in discriminating or, synonymously, civil society there is a plurality

⁴ See Bernstein (1986c: 256), Ring (1991: 449), Isaac (1992: 248-258), and Benhabib (1996a: 29, 195-204).

of groups whose members are or choose to be the *same*. The freedom characteristic of discriminating society is not, then, political freedom, but that of groups to associate exclusively with others of like background and outlook (1959: 51-52; *OR*: 279).

Controversially, Arendt thought social discrimination as “indispensable a ... right as equality is a political right,” even to the extent of opposing federal enforcement of school desegregation.⁶ She was wrong to believe the social and political so easily separable, but the point here is that she feared the political effect many civil-social groups could have, not least a recrudescence of organized racism. Social conformity endangers political freedom, even while it must be allowed exist alongside it. As much as it can enable the equality-in-difference definitive of authentic politics, so too does civil society enable lobby and other interest groups whose goals are sectional and destructive of a shared public realm (*CR*: 96). Moreover, that some associations transcend sectional interests does not mean they necessarily escape the vices characteristic of party politics. If anything, they are as vulnerable to “fanaticism, ideologies, and a destructiveness that often borders on the criminal.”⁷ These are all dangers *if* civil society directs itself to politics. Yet many other associations encourage an equally dangerous retreat from the world. The “communes of hippies and dropouts” are associations of world renunciation and as such do nothing to prevent political evil (*CR*: 232).

Given these deep reservations, it is wrong to regard Arendt as a civil society enthusiast. Instead, her demand is for a *transformation of the state* itself. Her councils or “elementary republics” entail “a new concept of the state” contributing to a “direct regeneration of democracy” (*CR*: 233; *OR*: 263). To locate citizenship within “wild,” “anarchic,” and “anonymous” weak publics is therefore to be guilty of severing citizenship’s constitutive connection with decision-making. For Arendt, civil society theory is flawed because it unwittingly legitimates Weber’s Platonic separation of *archein* and *pratein* in holding to his model of the state, where effective power is monopolized at the centre. Associations are celebrated because they resist the “powerful” few who occupy the core, but this resistance is already a capitulation, for it works on the assumption that state and government are not *for*

⁵ In discriminating society “we become subject to the old adage ‘like attracts like’ which controls the whole realm of society in the innumerable variety of its groups and associations” (Arendt, 1959: 51).

⁶ “The question” is “not how to abolish discrimination, but how to keep it confined within the social sphere,” and this means leaving large areas of social, as opposed to private and political, existence open to discrimination even on racial grounds (1959: 51). See Young-Bruehl (1982: 308-318).

⁷ Arendt (*CR*: 204). She had in mind the excesses of some student movements in Germany and France and Black Power separatism in America.

and *by* citizens but *over* and *against* them.⁸ When Arendt praised voluntary associations she did so in the belief that they were demanding a hold on the reins of power, entry *into* the state itself.⁹

Thus Arendt calls for direct, *substantive*, rather than indirect, *procedural*, citizenship. Substantive citizenship demands that power be spread throughout a polity in the manner of republican federalism. A federal republic beginning with “grass root” councils and concluding with national, even international, fora, does not monopolize *praxis* and invite rebellion but relies on institutionally “separated” and “mediated” power. Power is “separated” when there is not just a balance between the arms of government but also a balance between different locations and sources of power, that is, between federally constituted town, city, state, and national deliberative councils. Because “only ‘power arrests power,’” juridical constraints on autocracy are figments of abstract right without the interplay between a multiplicity of powerful locations (*OR*: 151). Indeed, only through federation does a polity manage to preserve and increase power through the combination, as opposed to assimilation, of distinct political bodies.

Power is “mediated,” differently, when diverse opinions undergo a process of institutional distillation. In Arendt’s ideal republic opinions and decisions are filtered from the bottom to the top so that the “arbitrary and the merely idiosyncratic” are more likely to be purged (*OR*: 227). This mediating process also changes the meaning of authority, which instead of being imposed downwards is continually generated at each deliberative layer (*OR*: 278). Leaders are selected not because they have the requisite will to force policies through, but because they enjoy the “special trust” of *peers* who think them fit to represent their opinions at the next higher level. Through such multiple processes of selection the tension between authority and equality is lessened, thus side-stepping Weber’s dominative and unmediated leader-follower relation.¹⁰ The members of such “elementary” republics would, Arendt admits, constitute a “self-selected elite” of those having shown “a taste for public freedom,” but she is anxious to distinguish this from Weber’s model of the active leader and passive mass (*OR*: 279). The number of spaces for active participation being dramatically

⁸ As Pitkin (1998: 282-283) puts it, “Seeking to force “them” [the rulers] to change “their” government and policy does not yet recognize government and policy as ... ours, everyone’s concern.”

⁹ Thus, “wherever knowing and doing have parted company, the space of freedom is lost” and it is lost precisely when citizens lack the “right to vote, choose *and* control their government” (*OR*: 164, 264).

¹⁰ Unmediated in that the *Reichspräsident* and the electorate are linked not through multiple deliberative fora but by plebiscites (*OR*: 228). Weber did think parliament a pivotal “mediating”

increased, all would be given the “opportunity” to participate and those who chose not would be “self-excluded,” a non-derogatory exclusion since resulting from personal choice (CR: 233; OR: 280).

Although Arendt did not think through the implications of “self-selected elites,” as will be argued (Ch 7.III.i), hers is an ambitious vision. It is impressive, however, not for its ambition but for what it reveals about citizenship. Because they are weak and anarchic, peripheral public spheres cannot provide the separation, mediation, and ordered continuity needed for institutional spaces of appearances, a “house where freedom can dwell” (OR: 28). Both a privilege and a precious achievement, citizenship demands formal stabilization in bounded locations to ensure the polity’s endurance through time, its identity.¹¹ This identity is secured through the constitutionalization of roles, prerogatives, immunities, and disabilities. Granting politics a “tangible” or “objective” worldly space, these uphold the boundaries of the public realm and prevent it from disappearing. When hemmed in by counter-balancing prerogatives and disabilities, citizenship is structured so as resist the whims and hubristic enthusiasms which often engulf mass public opinion and proved so amenable to the ceaseless flux of totalitarianism. Self-control, in other words, depends not just on character but also the institutional structure of the spaces we inhabit.

The soil of civil society is therefore too unstable for citizenship or a determinate institutional *praxis* to take root. That institutional *praxis* best pertains when the relationship between citizens is one of civic friendship, defined by a balance between commonality and difference, solidarity and distance. Citizens are motivated to maintain the integrity of the public realm when they regard themselves as co-originators of a shared project. This project does not presume sameness, but rather people of diverse and irreducible backgrounds acting in concert. Separating and relating, friendship preserves the particular and unique identity of each actor while at the same time facilitating the commonality requisite for joint action. A final problem with civil society, or at least with how it has been theorized, is that it fails to maintain this delicate balance. Habermas prizes civil society because its “subjectless networks” and “anonymous publics” permit the universal standpoint of the “generalized other.”¹² To Arendt’s mind this subjectless anonymity errs on the side of distance,

ground, but his increasing enthusiasm for the plebiscite lessened the possibilities for separating charlatans from politically responsible leaders.

¹¹ Thus contradicting Sullivan (1973: 183-198), Jay (1978: 364) and Winters (1987: 200-201), who think her politics an anarchistic celebration of sheer spontaneity. See Waldron (2000: 201-219).

¹² “The ‘self’ of the ... legal community disappears in the subjectless forms of communication that regulate the flow of discursive opinion- and will-formation” (BFN: 301). For an Arendtian critique of “subjectless communication,” see May (1997: 92-96).

surrendering the unique particularity of each actor to a levelling generality and mistaking solidarity for anaemic proceduralism. The motivational impetus behind joint action then becomes obscure, for actors are unlikely to combine if that combination fails to reflect *who* they are, their unique substantive particularity. The contrary error, perpetuated by the New Left and some communitarian successors, is to over-emphasize commonality. Civil society is here prized not because it facilitates a levelling generality but, oppositely, the “natural ties” of fraternity and intimacy. Modelled on the family and the commune, the danger here is that equality-in-difference gives way to a suffocating sameness of outlook which closes down the space between people and their different locations in the world. Warmth and romantic sentimentality thereby over-ride the situated impartiality and sober solidarity needed when diverse actors meet as citizens.

Embracing the phenomena of contingency and risk and yet spurning Weber’s political realism, Arendt reacquaints us with the peculiarities of political life in a way that still leaves room for hope, natality. That hope comes to the fore in her vision of substantive citizenship, whose importance is that it refuses to accept the inevitability of the “iron-cage,” at least in the political realm. A fragile achievement, citizenship is both a manifestation of freedom and the result of world-preserving moderation and care. As will be argued in Chapter Eleven, a robust politics holds to a substantive notion of citizenship and marries institutional preservation with change in awareness of the possibilities and dangers of political existence. This is Arendt’s enduring contribution to the attempt to rearticulate the potential of politics.

But Arendt is also an obstacle. In the following we will criticise a number of philosophical errors marring her understanding of action and political judgement. The goal is to disrupt her dualism of necessity and freedom, which permits her to denigrate labour and economics as less meaningful than politics, and to show the inadequacies of “performative action.” Questioning her model of political judgement, we also show that Arendt’s bifurcations render political ethics obscure, lead us back into speculative solutions to political problems, and, ironically, reaffirm Weber’s subjectivism.

7.II.) Philosophical Perplexities

7.II.i.) Necessity, Freedom, and “Purposeful Performance”

Responding to totalitarian chaos Arendt bifurcates self and world, raises action above labour as the most meaningful of human activities, and understands action, by contrast to work, as a self-contained performance lying “altogether outside the category of means and ends” (*HC*: 207). These three manoeuvres are wrong and in ways detrimental to a proper conceptualization of politics.

In its physical and psychical dimensions Arendt’s self is a subjective darkness lacking the tangible reality of the phenomenal world. World and intersubjective existence being illuminated by a free publicity, the self is a realm of pure interiority swayed by ephemeral emotions and subject to brute bodily appetite. This is Arendt’s prime reason for relegating labour to “necessity” and the household, and for sidelining “inner” motives and intentions in her analysis of deeds.

But this relegation and sidelining depend on dubious assumptions. The first is that freedom and necessity can be accorded distinct realms, the second that these realms are self-contained. As to the first, by her own account of phenomenal appearance and natality Arendt *cannot* spatially divide freedom and necessity. She differentiates labour and action in terms of intensity of appearance, action being the most intensely public, but then nullifies this division by arguing that men *and* animals all exhibit an urge to self-display.¹³ Appearance therefore does not of itself entitle us to confine labour to darkness, for like action it too appears in the light of day. The same problematic overlap characterizes natality. “Labour and work, *as well as* action,” we are told, “are also rooted in natality insofar as they have the task to provide and preserve for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant flux of newcomers.”¹⁴ This is a telling admission, since it contradicts Arendt’s subsequent claims that labour must necessarily be cyclical, repetitive, and animal. If natal, then labour, and by extension the economic, also bears the imprint of human freedom, even while it deals with bodily conditions that are given, not willed. But if labour admits freedom, then so too must action admit necessity. Just as the labourer faces givens, so too does the actor face historical irreversibilities, deeds having been done which no one can now change. Bodily need and past deeds are clearly different, but both stand as obstacles in the way of desire. Yet it is not

¹³ All “living things *make their appearance* like actors on a stage set for them” (*LM*, I: 21).

the case, as Arendt maintains, that need must elicit a pre-determined response, whereas past deeds lie open to vengeful reaction or forgiveness.¹⁵ Need lies open to numerous responses dependent not just on natural abundance but also on how that abundance is *interpreted*. The fact, for instance, that distributive justice from ancient to modern times embraces concepts such as personal desert attests to the interpenetration of nature and culture. Whether needs *ought* to be satisfied is therefore not a matter of mute compulsion but dependent on norms and ideals.

If labour is natal and material need always interpreted need, then Arendt's claim that political action alone reveals human uniqueness, the "who" of doers and sufferers, must also be contested. In labouring labourers reveal both themselves and their cultural or interpreted condition, and this revelation yields part of their identity.¹⁶ But once freedom and necessity blend, the self-containedness of Arendt's realms likewise gives way. Because ontologically boundless, because snaking out along a web of relationships *and* a web of human activities, natality imbues every sphere of life to disclose not radical disjunction between activities but their co-determination. Arendt concedes as much. "Specialization of work and division of labor" have in common "the general principle of organization," which owes its origin to "the strictly political sphere of life, to the fact of man's capacity to act and to act together" (HC: 123). She therefore suggests that the gap between labour and action, perceived necessity and perceived freedom, is *sociological* rather than ontological, a question not of Being but of cultural, historical construction.

This, we will see, has weighty ramifications for Arendt's understanding of the "social." Equally weighty problems impair her theatrical notion of action. Action, it is claimed, exhibits a "practical purposelessness" standing beyond "mere productive activity" (HC: 177, 180). The "innermost meaning" of the deed inhering in the moment or performance itself, action is unburdened by motives and intentions, which are private, and by purposes and consequences, which in the manner of work impose a single path or design inimical to plurality. Idolizing success and violently degrading all things into means for external

¹⁴ (HC: 9, my italics). She admits this repeatedly, even using a labour metaphor ("A child has been born unto us" HC: 246) to convey natality's meaning, yet all the while failing to note the implications for her conceptual landscape.

¹⁵ Deeper philosophical questions arise here. Necessity and labour are conceptually tied to "process," an automatic movement lacking "any inherent *telos*" (HC: 47). Yet action is also "process-like" in the sense that it initiates "unprecedented processes" and that these once initiated become automatic cycles of reaction and counter-reaction (HC: 230-231). But if process is germane to both activities, then Arendt is not entitled to draw a strict contrast between them (D'Entrèves, 1994: 53-58).

¹⁶ Thus the results of "human labour are therefore vehicles of meanings and values, and not mute objects upon which meaning is subsequently conferred by some other activity" (Parekh, 1979: 86).

“higher” ends, when work becomes the mode of politics it leads to the utopian yet totalitarian “hope that it may be possible to treat men as one treats other material” (*HC*: 188).

There is much to be said for Arendt’s anti-instrumentalism. Against the monological image of the sovereign maker, Arendt strives toward a truly intersubjective ideal of interaction. This interaction is radically plural and therefore uncertain, it being impossible to negate risk or control the future. But the excessive cost of this recovery is that action as a concrete activity becomes arcane. Specifically, Arendt’s account is philosophically flawed in erecting a radical disjuncture between elements which only *together* render action comprehensible. As to motives and intentions, it is not true that they are publicly inaccessible or, as Arendt claims elsewhere, that because psychological data they are somehow natural and therefore the same in everyone, unremarkable (*HC*: 206; *LM*, I: 34-36). Intentions and motives are as accessible as personality and exhibit a rich variety commensurate with human diversity. Moreover, Arendt’s own “banality of evil” thesis, the horrible truth that some actors were led to atrocity out of no wickedness but a failure to think, attests to the importance of motives in our assessment of political events. Neither is it true that purposes and consequences do not affect the “meaning” of a deed. Certainly action may “never achieve its purpose” but that does not change the fact that action is always purposive (*HC*: 184). Issuing from the interaction of many actors, a deed’s purpose lends it its sense, and only when this purpose is compared with both the enactment and eventual consequences does the virtuosity, tragedy or absurdity of an act shine through. Meaning is, then, a complex concept irreducible to a singular “moment,” but like Arendt’s “web of relationships” composite and multi-dimensional.

Some commentators attempt a defence here. Knauer points to passages where action is said to be “interested” in “some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent” (*HC*: 182). Thus, Arendt does not exclude purposes, consequences, motives or intentions from her concept of action; she simply claims that the meaning of action *transcends* these to embody a “principle” disclosive of the actor (Knauer, 1980: 725). But that she acknowledges motives, purposes and goals does not redeem her position. Arendt’s error is to accord these phenomena a secondary *incidental* status, for only if incidental can they be transcended at all. If, by contrast, one emphasises the complex internal constitution of action, then these phenomena cannot be transcended. Instead, it is their constitutive interrelation that illuminates the essence or “principle” both of actors and their worldly circumstances. Knauer’s attempted reconciliation glosses over the core problem, that Arendt’s concept of action is defined through a fundamental opposition to

purposiveness or work.¹⁷ Thus, even though she remembers purposes, these stand out as the disjointed parts of an unintegrated, discordant whole. The only way this whole can be integrated is to reject her theatrical account and to reconceptualize action as, in Dietz's (1994: 882) words, *purposeful performance*.

A fuller exploration of purposeful performance, which disputes the easy opposition between work and *praxis*, will come later (Ch 10.I.ii). For now it is important to ask why Arendt came to her theatrical account and what it means for her broader theory. Arendt's theatrical politics springs from a crude understanding of purposes based on the instrumental utilitarianism articulated in Weber's *Zweckrationalität*. That articulation pictures purposive action as monological, inherently dominative, governed by technical models, and driven by a will to victory at all costs. Excluded from the outset is a conception of purposive action defined by human plurality, non-technical criteria, and open to future uncertainty.¹⁸

The repercussions for her broader theory are considerable. Culture and world must be preserved from destruction by laws and boundaries, but the mode of this preservation is left untheorized. The careful organization and reflexive forethought needed to surmount unpredictable obstacles and crises are brushed aside in favour of celebrating the "glorious moment" which, surpassing mere "achievement," is alone supposed to save human dignity (HC: 180). Arendt thereby ensnares herself within traps of her own making. She speaks of excellence or virtuosity in action as "finding the right words at the right moment" in capricious circumstances (BPF: 137). Yet by relegating purposes, consequences and what goes on temporally in between them, she eliminates criteria for assessing the aptness of specific words in particular situations.¹⁹ Virtuosity signals an unerring ability or excellence in navigating a course through dangerous waters. It means success *without* surrender of ideals and *without* deifying "Progress" or some determinate Platonic Idea. Mistaking this unerring ability for an idolatry of "Progress" and a willingness to surrender dignity, however, Arendt is unable to distinguish prudent sailing from errant recklessness, the frivolous or foolish gesture blending with the wise and prudential act with no hope of differentiation. Tragedy may in the end be all there is to redeem human dignity, yet tragedy

¹⁷ He (1980: 728) in fact perpetuates the problem when speaking of the concern for purposes as a concern for "mere achievement," "mere instrumentality." See Dietz (1994: 885).

¹⁸ As Dietz argues (1994: 883), Arendt conceives all "means-end relations as necessarily and not just contingently connected to acts of violence" and thus rules out "liberatory forms of instrumentality."

¹⁹ One solution proposed by D'Entrèves (1994: 84) and Benhabib (1996a: 124) is to emphasize the communicative aspects of Arendt's theory of action over the theatrical. That solution fails for the reason that Habermasian communicative action also depends on a fundamental opposition between purposiveness and speech.

is not comedy but instead a lament for what really might have been *achieved* had not stupidity or fate intervened.

Arendt, then, misunderstands the point of action. Beginning anew and preserving that beginning for future generations is an intrinsically *prospective* affair whose inchoate meaning must be present to actors. That she understands *praxis* as performative or theatrical means she takes an exclusively *retrospective* or historical view. The “meaning” of the deed reveals itself only to those, the audience or historian, who see the whole. The problem here is that the storyteller can narrate past deeds only if he knows what it means to act. Arendt narrates the sudden rise of totalitarian terror, a terror defined, as we saw, by a complete lack of concern with the consequences of one’s deeds (*OT*: 417-419). It is unfortunate that, despite her watchful care, she should verge on a similar lack of concern.

7.II.ii.) Reflective Knowledge, Experience, and “Interested” Judgement

One danger of Arendt’s theatrical account of action is that because it fails to reconceive purposiveness it ends up legitimating Weberian *Zweckrationalität* by default. This is at least true as regards the activities falling under social-as-economic (Ch 7.III.i). Our immediate concern, however, is to see how the relegation of purposes impacts on her theory of reflective judgement. The argument is that this relegation prevents *humanitas* gaining concrete purchase on everyday politics, an error compounded by her separation of heteronomous actors and autonomous spectators. Wrongly emphasizing “disinterested” impartiality as the condition for thinking and judging, Arendt succumbs to an alienating Archimedean Point which reinvents subjectivism and threatens to render impossible the good citizen’s “thinking-in-acting.”

Arendt, we claimed, turns to the faculty of judgement to avoid Weber’s decisionism and to suggest how men come to an understanding of political contingencies without their subsumption under received ideas or categories, the danger of modern ideology. Judgement is not monological but takes its orientation from a plurality of intersecting perspectives. Declaring the self the ultimate arbiter in matters of ethical commitment, as opposed to questions of efficiency and coherence, Weber places an impermeable divide between persons thwarting the possibility of ethical exchange. Ethics degrades either into the dominative assertion of a “true” path revealed to the isolated self or, in line with charismatic leadership, into a matter of overawing audiences with the potency of one’s words. The publicity Arendt

defends as the criterion of good judgement is not a manipulated publicity, but instead relies upon persuasion, the attempt to woo others by appeal to a shared “community sense.”

But Arendtian judgement represents only a partial advance upon Weber. In particular, her insistence upon an opposition between cognition and non-cognitive reflection indicates her adherence to a problematic conceptual framework. Thoroughly Kantian, it is problematic precisely because it is the framework largely adhered to by Weber. We saw that Arendt believes cognition or knowing concerns matters of fact and is therefore detached from the realm of meaning, which is the concern not of the cognitive intellect but of judgement. To this opposition between determinate truth and indeterminate opinion, she adds the binaries of nature versus culture, necessity versus freedom. In her exploration of judgement the free and the cultural concern and give rise to feelings of purposeless pleasure and displeasure, never knowledge. The problem here, again, is that purposes, ends and goals are understood as falling under the shadow of a determinately conceived, hence unfree, monological knowledge, which always pursues “a definite aim ... like fabrication itself” (*HC*: 170-171).²⁰ Arendtian judgement reproduces the disjuncture of purposes and meaning marring her account of action.

This epistemic disjuncture has serious practical effects. Because it is cognitive, and because cognition is conceived along the “certain” lines of fabrication, knowledge becomes the unpolitical possession of subjects inhabiting scientific, administrative, philosophic or other “expert” realms. These experts acquire their knowledge not through “uncertain” processes of reflective questioning and dialogue, but through contemplation or experimental manipulation of mute sense experience. Since the truth of their endeavours compels assent via logical deduction or brute sensual intuition, the realms of expertise are thoroughly inimical to free citizenship. Yet this understanding is philosophically suspect insofar as it holds to modern epistemology’s “singular cognitive subject,” where knowing and knower are deemed prior to speech and where logical compulsion excludes imaginative thought (Wellmer, 1997: 41-42). Following Descartes and his empiricist opponents, Arendt elides the “symbolic structure” or linguisticity of knowledge attested to by the debate regarding paradigm shifts in science.²¹ That Arendt should conceal the role language and reflection play in scientific theories is remarkable given the central position accorded the history of

²⁰ Arendt (*LM*, I; 56-57; *LKPP*: 72) posits a constitutive link between cognition, science, and fabricating technology, science utilizing the laboratory “where that which does not appear of its own accord is forced to appear” and having nothing to do with “judgement, properly speaking.”

²¹ Arendt at times concedes this linguisticity, declaring that truth “as soon as it is uttered, is immediately transformed into one opinion among many, is contested” (*MDT*: 27). What she failed to note here was that truth, because recognisable *only* in language, always takes a contestable form.

science in her narrative of modernity, the turn from contemplative to imitative and then to interferential modes of cognition. That these turns were possible at all suggests the cognitive “subject” is not monological or determinate but plural and underdetermined, a meeting place of free creative energies both for good and for ill.

Once the reflectiveness of knowledge is recognized the inadequacies of Arendtian reflective judgement become plain. Not only does this theory of reflective judgement misconceive scientific truth, but in bifurcating knowledge and opinion it occludes criteria needed to discriminate between absurd and wise actions, the distinction between better and worse opinions then becoming impossible to draw. Arendt cites communicability or publicity as the basic criterion of good judgement, believing that men are never “overeager to express joy at the death of a father or feelings of hatred or envy” (*LKPP*: 69). But while necessary, communicability is hardly sufficient to fulfil this critical role, since people frequently give voice to nonsense and hatred. Fulfilment of this role means embracing substantive questions as to the content of action, the purposes involved, its historical context. And that embrace necessitates including cognitive matters, such as whether a judgement relies on an accurate assessment of facts, whether judges have requisite experience, whether, in short, they really *know* what they are talking about (Beiner, 1982: 137-138).

Without this substantive dimension Arendt’s *humanitas* remains a formal construct with tenuous purchase on concrete affairs. The substantive and the procedural are not divided, as in Habermas’ division of ethics and morality, but she ends up with a peculiarly “contentless” substantive ethic where an ideal of human life (*bios politikos*), an identity, is extolled as best but with little concrete being able to be said about it. This problem can be traced to the conceptual apparatus inherited from Kant. Severing morality and cognition from feeling, Kant distanced judgement from truth, separated form from content, and, lodging the experience of art solely in the subject’s feeling of pleasure and displeasure, brought about taste’s radical subjectivization (Feldman, 1991: 9-10). This disjunction facilitated the rise of romanticism in art and subjectivism and emotivism in ethics, against which Arendt herself rails.²² The irony is, then, that while she attempts to arrive at a worldly political ethic, the framework she chooses impels her toward a subjectivist refusal of anything but the most formal, and hence abstract, of bonds between subjects. Running counter to her idea of world as the space of cultural “tangibility” and the “web of relationships” (Ch 6.I), this choice also blinds her to those truths arising *in* the process of acting itself, an indeterminate knowledge

²² See Gadamer (1989: 41, 55). She railed against subjectivism, but her identification of conscience with the self’s preoccupation with itself does suggest a strong residual subjectivist element (Ch 7.I.i).

assimilable neither to *episteme* nor *poiesis* but arising directly out of practical experience. This concrete experience, the “common sense” arising out of it, is neither abstract nor rooted in subjective feeling alone but “acquired through [actually] living in ... community” (Gadamer, 1989: 22). Arendt wishes “to say how one came to an opinion and for what reasons one formed it,” but her concentration on the non-cognitive feelings of “pleasure and displeasure” decontextualized by Kant leads to a “mythology of judgement” wherein situated reasons and arguments no longer seem possible.²³

We will return to the question of practical truth (*phronesis*) and situated argument when defending MacIntyre’s neo-Aristotelian account of practices (Ch 9.III, 10.I.ii). However, the most serious flaw in Arendt’s theory of judgement, and therefore in her theory of political ethics, lies in her separation of heteronomous actors and autonomous spectators. Where actors are heteronomous, dependent on what other actors and onlookers think of them, spectators transcend the realm of *doxa*, opinion or fame, and in attaining an unconditioned autonomy establish the meaning of the whole to confer sense on human affairs.

The problem here is the presumption of unconditioned autonomy. Like Kant and yet in sharp contrast to her otherwise staunch refusal to substitute philosophy for politics, Arendt offers a transcendental account of judgement and its standard, *sensus communis*. This account presumes an unconditioned, *a priori* mental ability to achieve the distanced or enlarged perspective of “world spectator” (*LKPP*: 74-76).²⁴ This distanced perspective operates as a regulative ideal, an ahistorical, unverifiable *as if*, which is nonetheless assumed so as to permit the rendering of non-idiosyncratic judgements. But the assumption of autonomous distance conflicts with other aspects of Arendt’s thought. Her narrative of modernity hinges on the experience of earth and world alienation precipitated by humanity’s twofold “flight” into the Archimedean Point of the universe (Galileo) and of the self (Descartes). Because the universal Archimedean Point is enabled by the radically de-worlded language of algebraic mathematics and this language is dependent on “patterns which are identical with human, mental structures,” this twofold flight is in the end really a single retreat into the self, which, as “subjectification,” helped to initiate the multiplicitious transformations of intersubjective freedom into inner willing, property into fluid wealth, cultural artefacts into consumables, and ideals into exchange values (*HC*: 265-266).

²³ Arendt (*LKPP*: 41; *LM*, II: 217). See Beiner (1983: 133-134) and Wellmer (1997: 38).

²⁴ The *sensus communis* “takes account (*a priori*) of the mode of representation of all other men in thought, in order, *as it were*, to compare its judgement with the collective reason of humanity,” (*LKPP*: 71, quoting Kant).

Paradoxically, however, her transcendental *sensus communis* can be accused of a similar subjectification, the spectator's distance from the game replicating the physicist's distance from the earth. By her own account, it is only by retreating to a point at which he "might stand still and look back with the backward glance of the historian," and by comparing his "judgement with the *possible* rather than *actual* judgements of others," that the judge escapes the partiality of the actor.²⁵ The danger here is that by believing he can so distance himself from the game, "the web of relationships," the spectator might not in fact enlarge his mentality and come to a better awareness of his own and other identities, but instead continually encounter his private idiosyncrasies, himself repeatedly. Outside, the spectator is supposedly "not involved" in the things judged, but this non-involvement means he is insulated from events and without the rootedness and reality needed to discipline his opinion and subjectivity, the self itself. Arendt (*LKPP*: 63) claims that while the spectator "is not involved in the act ... he is always involved with fellow spectators," and hence that judgement, though autonomous, is nonetheless intersubjective. This does not solve the problem, however. Equally distanced, such spectators may *all* be similarly caught within subjective preferences, their "enlarged mentalities" simply a reflection of shared preferences and prejudices. Moreover, although the game is scrutinized, the spectators performing this scrutinizing, their *parts* or positions in the web of relationships, are not.²⁶ To demand withdrawal from the game is, then, analogous to demanding withdrawal from the world and its interconnected stories, an indirect embrace of the world alienation.²⁷

Categorically separating actor and spectator, presuming an unconditioned autonomy, and supposing an *a priori* community sense, Arendt catches herself on the horns of a dilemma. The dilemma is that her theory of action rules out unconditioned autonomy and illusory sovereignty in stressing the heteronomous intersubjectivity of freedom, but her theory of judgement, supposedly the most political of men's faculties, presupposes this very autonomy in presuming a transcendence of the web of relationships by spectators who play

²⁵ (*LKPP*: 77, 43, my italics). This possible/actual judgement distinction underlies the *a priorism* of Kantian *Urteilstkraft*, since if compared judgements were actual the *sensus communis* would be empirical, not universal. Here Arendt masks the distinction, but earlier (*BPF*: 221) she argued that because judgement takes actual opinions into account it can never be universally valid. Crucially, however, that argument occurs in a passage where *actors* are said to judge.

²⁶ Arendtian "disinterestedness," in other words, obscures how events *transform* "the selves who come to judge them by exposing internal conflicts and involving those who judge in an event of being that challenges their settled self-understandings" (Feldman, 1991: 8).

²⁷ She (*LKPP*: 42) rules out some "higher standpoint ... [settling] the dispute by being altogether above the *mêlée*," yet this contradicts her insistence on seeing wholes, standing still, withdrawal. There is, then, a basic inconsistency in her theory, that the autonomy linked with sovereignty and

no part. Thus, she either sides with autonomy and declares the “as if” transcendental community sense to be real, thus leaving herself open to the charge of concealing subjective prejudices behind a speculative Archimedean Point, or she admits that for judgement to be sound it must take stock of the *actual* opinions of others. But “taking stock” means two things. First, that the web of relationships can never be transcended, even temporarily, since it is only by engaging with this web in thought that an informed view of others and ourselves can be attained. Thought in fact presumes such engagement, since its condition is language, the living word. Second, it means speaking to others, and speaking, according to Arendt’s phenomenology, is *acting*, which is never autonomous, because rooted in the game, but is nonetheless free. Arendt, accordingly, escapes an Archimedean conceit she elsewhere properly rejects only by repudiating the superiority of spectators over actors.

It is only by the latter course that Arendt can speak of a worldly, rather than speculative, community sense. But the cost of taking it is that impartiality can no longer be understood as “disinterested” and that the difference between actors and spectators, citizens and historians, becomes one of degree, not kind. Political actors and onlookers differ inasmuch as they face discrete problems and tasks, but both play parts and are “interested,” caught up in the flux of circumstance and struggling to make sense of events. Judgement and understanding are, like action, ever ongoing, there being no space within which one can stand still. In suggesting there might be, Arendt falls guilty of what she accuses Habermas, of substituting theory for worldly engagement, and consequently threatens to destroy her cherished balance between excessive distance and suffocating commonality (Ch 7.I.i., 7.I.ii.). She does so because even she is tempted by the possibility of philosophic absolutes, of stepping out of politics. This time the chimera is not “perfect communication” but rather an “arbiter” or “privileged position” which, in judging the glorious self-contained “moment,” saves existence from absurdity.²⁸ To refuse this “arbiter,” to admit instead a heteronomous impartiality rooted in the world and premised on the awareness that the surge of political events washes over everyone, would in fact reconfirm what is enduringly significant in Arendt’s thought, her recognition of worldly existence as contingent, never sovereign, and therefore never unconditionally autonomous, but for all that precious. It would also reconfirm judgement as a truly prospective political capacity. When declaring the actor

denied actors is presumed as regards spectators. Compare, as well, (*LKPP*: 27), where the spectator’s autonomy is denied, with (*LKPP*: 55), where it is affirmed.

²⁸ (*LM*, I: 94, 207-209; Beiner, 1982: 148). Arendt denies this “arbiter” can ever judge with finality, but in thinking him “autonomous” and in arguing for an absolute superiority over the actor, she neglects the truth that the “historian does not simply stand over against his object, historical life, but is himself part of the same movement of historical life” (Gadamer, 1989: 506).

could only play his benighted part, Arendt in fact implied that “thinking-in-acting” is impossible, the demands of the *vita activa* being too great a distraction. Unbeknownst to herself, however, she thereby ruled out the question she addressed Eichmann, “did you not think *while* committing your crimes?” To reject the superiority of the spectator is, thus, to preserve personal responsibility, the “good citizen,” as a meaningful category.

In the following section we return to Arendt’s ideal of citizenship and understanding of risk. Arendtian citizenship goes beyond Habermasian “radical reformism,” but it depends on a dualism strikingly similar to his lifeworld-system binary. Through bifurcating or “ontologically spatializing” reality into the social and political Arendt hopes to challenge the “iron cage,” yet she covertly fortifies it by ascribing vast areas of socio-political existence to the technocrat and his inherently violent tools. In questioning her equation of social problems with necessity and violence, however, we are also driven to question her insistence that only relations of “being-with” or friendship are genuinely political. In thinking coercion anti-political Arendt commits the inverse of Weber’s error, his equation of political leadership with domination, and thus occludes those moments when a robust politics must take the form of overt and principled hostility.

7.III.) Truncating Politics and Attenuating Risk

7.III.i.) Political Experts and Social Citizens

Arendt's "Dual State" ideal holds to a radical disjunction of social experts and political citizens, administration and republican participation, economic liberty and political freedom. Because the social-as-economic concerns necessity and matters about which no "enlightened self-interest" can be secured, only experts having requisite knowledge and neutral techniques should determine its functioning. To avoid the hubristic, ceaseless flux of totalitarianism, it is imperative to draw boundaries and secure a balance between the different realms of human existence.

But is Arendt justified in separating the social-as-economic and the political? Regarding her equation of the social-as-economic with necessity, we saw she cannot coherently argue for this separation when by her own admission natality imbues all realms of existence. She must, instead, argue that politics should direct itself to genuinely political as opposed to private "interests," that when economic issues are at stake citizens lack the ability to make mature judgements, and that the social concerns pre-political questions or conditions which are important, certainly, but not the proper subject of political deliberation. As with her extrapolations from necessity, however, these arguments founder.

Regarding discrete "interests," Arendt contends that because the public realm "existed before us and is meant to outlast our lives in it," the "primary concern" cannot be "individual lives and the interests connected to them" (*BPF*: 156). There are "interests," she suggests, which properly concern politics, as opposed to "interests" in the self or one's own group. Her example is of jurors occupied not with personal gain but with the integrity of a world "common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it" (*HC*: 52; 1979: 317). What jurors "share is an interest in the case --- something outside themselves," an equitable rendering of justice differing fundamentally from bodily needs and personal desires (1977d: 105). Indeed, when actors attend to such interests it is often at the cost of sacrificing personal advantage, the only compensation for which is a feeling of "public happiness."

It is assuredly true that certain concerns are intrinsically public and because fundamentally interpersonal, unlike choice of entertainment, cannot be reduced to personal likes or advantage. To the example of juries one might add systems of government, infrastructures, and cultural goods such as history, language, art. But Arendt errs in thinking this warrants relegating the social-as-economic to privacy. Simply put, individual welfare --- as opposed to entertainment --- and worldly interest cannot be separated. To believe they

can is almost to believe there can be a world without individuals and individuals without a world. As her own claim about economic pre-conditions attests, justice cannot be rendered except by jurors with the material resources enabling them to look to public concerns and engage in deliberation. This question of resources relates not merely to brute physical need but also, we saw (Ch 7.II.i), to how need is *interpreted*. And such interpretations are, contra Arendt, fundamentally political matters disclosive of the *spirit* governing a public realm. A jury system wherein participants received no financial support, for instance, would be one structurally predisposed towards oligarchic or other dominant interests. The spirit or principle of justice endorsed would then not be of an *isonomic* republic but of a privileged class.

Arendt's fundamental worry regarding the economic is that because livelihoods are at stake people fail to muster the courage required to take long-term views, the short cycle of their individual lives predisposing them to selfishness and immediate benefits (*CR*: 175). This is a genuine worry, but not confined to material matters, to *animal laborans*. It is just as plausible that actors suffer a similar short-sightedness regarding "ideal" interests such as status, esteem and power, that selfishness is a general, rather than specific, problem.²⁹ If so, then public-spiritedness and responsibility become questions of *attitude* or mentality, not content (Pitkin, 1994: 277; Benhabib, 1996a: 141). Arendt herself suggests as much. Citizens are distinguished by courage, the ability to think representatively, and a love of equality and freedom, yet these are virtues of *character* peculiar to no one activity. The real import of political responsibility is, then, that citizens take into account other viewpoints and perspectives regardless of theme. The danger Arendt courts in alleging that some matters necessarily incapacitate or corrupt the ability to think representatively is that this ability might be considered unrealizable, naive, in all spheres of life. If material conditions lie beyond reflection, then there is little hope for citizenship itself.

If Arendt errs in thinking economics beyond the capacity of mature judgement, is she nonetheless right to consider it a pre-condition, basic to politics but not its concern? The implausibility of this view is plain even under the doctrine of *raison d'état*, that the state has unique, irreducible concerns. At the very minimum the state must itself secure the conditions of its continued survival, its means of subsistence and commerce.³⁰ Far from being a pre-condition to be settled before politics can begin, these tasks have from ancient to modern times persistently yielded a core element of political deliberation. Arendt's own

²⁹ Arendt's (*HC*: 197; 1990: 83) observation that reckless ambition doomed Athens is a case in point.

³⁰ As Aristotle (*Rhetoric*, 1359b, my italics) declares, the chief political subjects are "ways and means; and war and peace; next, national defence; and *imports and exports*; finally, legislation."

recommendations regarding expropriation are pertinent examples. The retrieval of property from senseless cycles of wealth accumulation is quintessentially a decision motivated by *political* crisis, the rise of mass society. And it is because this crisis arose out of unemployment, inflation and the disintegration of class systems that the economic can in no explicable sense be thought a pre-condition (*OT*: 315, 437). Indeed, Arendt has to accept the irreducibly political nature of economics if her council republics are not to become ideological covers for further expropriation. If “self-selected elites,” those who are supposedly the best politically, should hold the reins of power, then, as with juries, to prevent that hold from subsequently denying others the “opportunity” to participate, political *isonomy* has to be matched by wide-ranging economic *isonomy*.³¹ This latter isonomy would not simply demand a recovery of “property,” but also a reorganization of production and capital markets. That Arendt did not think through these wider ramifications of her republicanism suggests a regrettable naivety on her part.

The problem is not simply one of naivety, however. The overall effect of Arendt’s sidelining of the social-as-economic is the *truncation* and *de-radicalization* of citizenship as an ideal. The promise of politics is the human capacity for beginning anew, but because so much is excluded from the authentically “political” the scope for the exercise of that capacity becomes extremely limited. Once the social is banished all that remain are founding, preserving the contours of republics, and public display. “Substantive citizenship” surpasses Habermas’ “radical reformism” by refusing to separate decision-making from opinion-formation and by insisting upon structured institutional sites for action. Yet Arendt surrenders that gain in suggesting this institutional *praxis* is secured only by radically circumscribing the content of political debate.³² The problem of content therefore afflicts not just her theory of judgement but her thought as a whole, with the consequence that serious and perennial features of political endeavour fall from view.

A truncated citizenship is but one negative effect. Her account of the social also has the paradoxical outcome of legitimating the diametric opposite of her *bios politikos*, bureaucratic technocracy. As with Habermas’ dichotomization of system and lifeworld (Ch 4.III.i), by confining the machine within a specific realm Arendt hopes to escape Weber’s monistic

³¹ See especially Sternberger (1977: 142-145) and Bernstein (1986c: 249). It is therefore not insignificant that “government by the people” in Athens “was in some degree at least the result of the introduction of payment for public service” (Walker, 1927: 106).

³² Arendt (1979: 316) eventually admitted that the topics of public debate change constantly, that “what these matters *are* at any historical *moment* is probably *utterly* different.” But this means that her (*OR*: 89) claim that economic concerns lead necessarily to the destruction of solidarity is untenable. See Bernstein (1986c: 255-257) and Wolin (1994: 300).

antinomy of machine and leader. Yet instead of disrupting the “iron cage,” huge swathes of human existence are shunted under the shadow of a social-scientific rationality authorized on the basis of an allegedly “neutral” technical instrumentalism. The self-conception of social scientists and bureaucrats, that theirs is the serious task of determining the material existence of humankind, is then perpetuated with the effect that it becomes isolated from sustained criticism. The paradox is that Arendt should think technology “neutral” when the thrust of her critique of modernity is against the Promethean faith in humanity’s technical prowess and its political counterpart, the rule of “Nobody.” In truth, however, her deep fear of technology’s political implications, of the “negative solidarity” atomic weapons have enforced on the earth, coexists with an equally deep, yet naive, faith in technology as regards “the Social Question.”³³

This odd trust in technical neutrality presupposes her separation of “certain” knowledge and “uncertain” reflective understanding, which, we argued, is philosophically unsound. Arendt herself comes somewhat to conceding this. Whether new housing should preserve the fabric of old neighbourhoods is a matter of political opinion, whereas the factual “adequacy” of housing, “how many square feet human beings need,” should only be decided by experts (1979: 318-319). This concession is important insofar as it undermines the division between expert and political realms, every question *irrespective* of its location now having a “double face.” But even here her rigid binaries endure. Holding to the myth of neutrality, she fails to realize that the very process of calculating essential “square feet” is itself uncertain and relies on non-expert assumptions. The indeterminate and inherently evaluative term “adequacy” depends, for instance, on whether the chosen goal is survival or flourishing, which are themselves indeterminate. Technology and expertise are intrinsically *interested*, the decision about what gets built, for whom and where, relying on interpretations of political priorities and crises driven by frequently unthematized assumptions and expectations. The interrelation of politics and expertism is therefore not one of “aspects,” but of a much more fundamental *dynamic* between assumptions impelling know-how and know-how impelling future expectations. But to acknowledge this is to acknowledge experts as political and citizens as social and to reject Arendt’s boundary drawing.

The elementary repercussion of ontological spatializing, however, is that she and Habermas persist in thinking administrative and economic organization “machine-like.” When Habermas thinks of system as governed by a “norm-free sociality” and Arendt speaks

³³ “Mankind owes its existence not to the dreams of the humanists, not the reasoning of the philosophers and not even, at least primarily, to political events, but almost exclusively to ... technical development” (*MDT*: 82).

of administration as a neutral tool, they reinforce Weber's understanding of bureaucracy as a vast, supremely efficient instrument. Arendt condemned the "rule of Nobody" for its anonymity, for insulating men from reality and deadening their ability to think. It is the "nature of every bureaucracy to make functionaries and mere cogs in the administrative machinery out of men, and thus to dehumanize them" (*EJ*: 289). But while this illuminates palpable dangers, its unintended effect is to render them inevitable in like manner to the virtual inevitability of Habermas' "systems functionality." Arendt is correct if she means the *perception* of anonymity leads to a loss of responsibility. But instead of correcting perception and stressing the active role played by "functionaries," thereby re-empowering bureaucrats and citizens alike, her firm identification of bureaucracy with the technical only intensifies feelings of powerlessness and superfluity. To avoid this she would have to accept administration and the "social" as human endeavours responsive to intervention and change.³⁴

The most serious failing of Arendt's conceptualization of the social, however, is its legitimization of violent instrumentalism. We suggested Arendt's relegation of purposes and prospectivity in action could end in an unwitting legitimization of Weber's *Zweckrationalität* by default. Yet in the social realm this legitimization is not so much unwitting as actively embraced. *Only* "by means of violence, by forcing others to bear the burden of life," Arendt tells us, did ancient citizens become free, and *only* through manipulative technologies, which replaced human "tools" with machines, was this "old and terrible truth" overcome (*OR*: 114; 1987a: 32). Where politics is free, divorced from coercion, the social and its administrators are inextricably intertwined with domination. Two unacceptable conclusions follow. First, the master-slave relation suffers depoliticization, the problem of slavery and economic oppression being transformed from an ethical into a technical one of finding a technology that will substitute for human tools.³⁵ Gone, consequently, is any sense that such oppression stems from human relations *per se*, and although work retains a strong association with creativity, unlike in Habermas, the reduction of a quantitatively conceived labour to toil has

³⁴ Indeed, her (*CR*: 3-47) criticisms of the Pentagon's "problem-solvers" presumes that action and thought *are* possible in large-scale organizations. If these technocrats really had been cogs, her criticisms would have been forlorn, just as her condemnation of Eichmann would have been cruel. For a similar argument, see Lozowick (2001: 214-223).

³⁵ See especially Brunkhorst (2000: 183). Admittedly, Arendt did not hold firm to this technical understanding, at times affirming the Hegelian point that "the rule of master over slaves ... did not rest on superior means of coercion as such, but on superior organization of power" (*CR*: 149).

the effect of impoverishing human identity.³⁶ Together with her relegation of purposiveness and her subjectivizing account of judgement, this foreclosure renders Arendt's theorization of the human condition suspect. Second, and most significantly, Weber's realist definition of the state as the monopoly on the means of legitimate violence is transferred from its political context and rooted in the economic as a totalizing, incontrovertible truth. Because she imagines mankind's interrelation with nature as inherently dominative, it being the *essence* of technology to batter and destroy, and because she excludes a conception of purposive action defined by human plurality, this transference is an unavoidable consequence of her thought. Apart from dehumanizing economics, the danger is that once Arendt's erroneous division between freedom and necessity has been dismantled, as we have done here, it is just a simple step to assuming that the same realist logic applies foundationally to all interpersonal activities.

Weber's presuppositions are therefore not so much contested as relocated to an allegedly unrelated realm in the vain hope that they will obediently remain there. That Arendt should legitimate a blanket violent instrumentalism in a sphere capable of freedom is deeply paradoxical when her work had set itself the task of contesting the Platonic roots of Western political thought. "Substantive citizenship" challenges the necessity of the "iron cage," only later to covertly fortify it, to abandon that challenge. On this inadvertent abandonment two observations can be made. The first is that the great perils attributed by Arendt to modern mass society cannot be countered by seeking some ontological equilibrium or balance, human activities being simply too interwoven for that. The second is that crude dualist containment strategies lessen our understanding of politics, its significance, challenges and dangers. But this is to accept that necessity and violence belong no more uniquely to the social than do non-coercive freedom and power to the political, and therefore that the risk of politics is far more acute than allowed by Arendt.

7.III.ii.) Ineluctable Conflict, Political Enmity, and Risk

Earlier we praised Arendt's understanding of risk for posing an alternative to political realism (Ch 7.I.i). In contrast to Habermas, she stresses politics' dependence upon contingent narratives held together by contingent promises between equal, yet distinct, actors. Stressing plural, worldly care, Arendt provides a corrective counter-weight to

³⁶ See Bakan (1979: 54). Although breaking with her categories, Arendt on occasion accepted that labour and economic organization could admit freedom, as when she (1948: 398-406; *CR*: 216)

Weber's coercive sovereignty. The cost, however, of Arendt's specific circumvention of *political* realism is a thoroughgoing *social* realism. But once her division of the political and social, freedom and necessity, is questioned, the allocation of violence to the social alone must also be rejected. Arendt imagines the authentically "political" as a relation of non-coercive friendship or "being-with" and considers any deviation "anti-political" (Ch 6.III).³⁷ Recalling Habermas' failed containment of the strategic (Ch 4.III.ii), this portrayal is wrong for the reason that her account of the social is wrong, that is, it separates what cannot and should not be separated. Our argument relies on two immanent critiques, the first showing politics and coercion, power and violence, to be *interwoven*, the second showing this interwovenness to be an *inherent*, rather than incidental, feature of political life. Only by acknowledging this inherent interwovenness can the full risk of politics be understood.

As to the first critique, we saw that Arendt's assault upon the Western political tradition presumed a radical disjunction between power and violence. Vocal and plural, power is the essence of all government and, because "inherent in the very existence of political communities," an "end-in-itself" (CR: 151). Violence, by contrast, is mute and monological, an instrumental means relying on implements and strength without intrinsic relation to politics' condition, plurality. The significance of this perspective, we argued, is that it rules out coercive sovereignty as the basis of politics, if not of the social. Yet closer scrutiny of her thought reveals real problems. The equation of the social with mute necessity and of necessity with violence entails that violence occurs "outside the political realm, strictly speaking" (OR: 19). Yet elsewhere Arendt (CR: 145-146) rejects this spatializing, essentialist view, claiming instead that the distinction between violence and power is analytic, "nothing ... [being] more common than" their "combination." Similarly, she admits that "neither violence nor power is a natural phenomenon," for both "belong to the political realm of human affairs whose essentially human quality is guaranteed by men's faculty of action" (CR: 179, 133). As with her example of "adequate housing," this admission collapses the division between violent and free realms, every political matter now conceivably admitting both speech and coercion.

Arendt further undercuts her oppositions when speaking of "justified" violence. Where power is "legitimate," directing its appeal to some past moment of joint action, violence is "justified," instrumentally appealing to the future ends it aims to achieve (CR: 150-151).

praised co-operativism in Denmark, Yugoslavia, the GDR, and Israel.

³⁷ We are not saying that Arendt had no understanding of violence. We are simply saying, in opposition to Isaac (1992: 133-136), that her architectonic theoretically depoliticizes violence and thereby buries normatively momentous features of political existence.

She subsequently asserts that the deployment of violence for short-term goals is often reasonable, as when used in self-defence, to dramatize ignored grievances, or to gain “a hearing for moderation” (CR: 176). Two problematic implications follow for her identification of politics with non-coercive “being-with.” First, her totalizing critique of Weber’s “lesser evil” doctrine collapses. Her complaint was that far from protecting us against “greater” evil this doctrine actually leads us to it, the means of violence becoming the end of politics. Certainly, Arendt’s argument has relevance. A real tendency exists to glorify or romanticize the resort to violence. Reducing politics’ “meaning” to battlefield death, Weber (RRW: 335) succumbed to such romanticism and thereby occluded the political realities of careful preservation and mutual endeavour. And once romanticized, it is but a short step to remove all limits and to equate politics with destruction and killing, as happened with totalitarianism. Yet Arendt (EU: 284) cannot respond to totalitarian excess by simply endorsing the principle of solidarity, “the concern of one is the concern of all,” for in accepting “justified” violence she concedes that solidarity is sometimes perilously inappropriate. She fears the threatened loss of limits, yet all politics, including her own, must at times take the risk of using violent means, and therefore all politics, not just Weber’s Platonism, is constrained to accept the inescapability of “lesser evil.” Assuredly, the exercise of violence demands great caution and should struggle to limit itself to determinate goals, but the “political” can no longer be defined *exclusively* in terms of friendship. Destructive, certainly, but violence now appears an authentic part of politics.

The second, more profound consequence of thinking violence “justifiable” is the disruption of Arendt’s elementary opposition between vocal power and mute physical force. When violence *can* be justified as a means towards political dramatization or reform, then whether a specific violent deed is deemed justified or not depends upon debate among actors. The unavoidability of debate in the moment of ascertaining justifiability suggests, in turn, that violence is not at all mute, but relies *temporally* upon the political processes of speaking and “being-with” others, no matter how small the group. But if so, the divide between it and speech is far less sharp than Arendt believes.³⁸ Furthermore, in presupposing a plurality of actors, whether they be conspirators, revolutionaries or ordinary citizens, political violence cannot be equated with monological coercive sovereignty. In its execution the violent deed depends upon magnified strength, but the processes preceding, enabling, and initiating its execution presume plural speech, the very bedrock of Arendtian politics.

³⁸ Even “the totalitarian ruler, whose chief instrument of rule is torture,” she admits, needs a vocal inner coterie and “a *power* basis --- the secret police and its net of informers” (CR: 149, my italics).

That violence and coercion are not identifiable with the use of implements *per se* finds further confirmation in her intermittent ruminations on the intrinsic negativities of power. The predominant tone of her analysis is celebratory. Power is that wondrous *dynamis* generated when men combine to establish a public realm wherein the glory of their deeds find preservation. But Arendt also notes its destructive qualities. Only power, not violence, can destroy individuality; only power, not the use of implements, can extinguish the strength, independence and spontaneity of persons.³⁹ Although never assuming the impossible form of coercive sovereignty, the “being-with” identifiable with power often takes the form of a peculiarly destructive mode of “acting together,” mob rule (*HC*: 203). Moreover, it was their “acting together,” not the possession of killing technology, which enabled a handful of SS guards, friends among themselves, to control and systematically dehumanize countless camp inmates. Power, in other words, has a constitutive connection to “being-with” but that connection can be even more balefully coercive than “pure” violence, which, we saw, also has a constitutive temporal connection to “being-with.” What this suggests is that Arendt’s account of violence as an essentially mute deployment of instruments represents a crude phenomenology blind to the various forms coercion takes, the least effective being perhaps the use of arms.

We have so far shown that by Arendt’s own account power and violence, speech and coercion, are often intimately *interwoven*. Without recognizing this interwovenness, the boundlessness and irreversibility she ascribes to action cannot fully explicate politics’ risk. As “justifiability” suggests, the risk of politics is that sometimes steps have to be taken which endanger peace and stability, disrupt solidarity, and make enemies of fellow actors. Arendt downplays that risk by identifying politics with non-coercive friendship. Yet she might still insist on seeing this interwovenness as an incidental matter of “perverted” forms of acting-together or, if occurring in uncorrupted polities, a question of instrumentally deploying violent means when tragic occasions arise, but not a basic feature of the political *qua* political. Even if sometimes necessary, the use of violent means remains “anti-political” insofar as it undercuts solidarity, the basis of all politics. There is point to this retort. Violence does threaten chaos and if solidarity is defined as the foundation of political existence, then violence is “anti-political.” Yet, while foundational, solidarity is *never* politics’ sole foundation, despite Arendt’s definitions. Indeed, the *inherent* interwovenness

³⁹ “The strength of even the strongest individual can always be overpowered by the many, who often will combine for no other purpose than to ruin strength precisely because of its peculiar independence” (*CR*: 143; *OT*: 455).

of violence and power, enmity and solidarity, is in fact implied by her answer to Weberian charismatic authority, the act of constituting a republic.

Arendt seeks to combine revolution and preservation in a constitutional law that is relational, not commanding. Such law, she believes, originates in the act of *mutual promising* and is upheld by the practice of *augmentation*, which overcome respectively the paradox of “unconstitutional” authority and the paradoxical relation between foundation and freedom (Ch. 6.III). Here Arendt presents a truly potent vision. For a constitution to be stable it must be present to citizens as meaningfully theirs and this is achieved only if a majority of citizens accept it as something they could have endorsed had they been present during its original formulation. Furthermore, without the capacity to be amended or augmented, a constitution’s authority dies, for authority must be responsive to ever-changing circumstances and crises. This insightful combination of meaningful belonging and augmentation also underlies, we will see, MacIntyre’s account of practices and traditions (Ch 9.III).

The problem, however, with Arendt’s vision is that it supposes mutual promising and augmentation can occur without *remainder*, without there being citizens who vehemently disagree with what has been promised or who resolutely spurn particular augmentations. Certainly the connection binding citizens is not some “identical will which somehow magically inspires them,” but rather “an agreed purpose for which alone the promises are valid and binding” (HC: 245). But this “agreed purpose” which validates an individual promise is *always* a specific purpose, and in being such it necessarily excludes others.⁴⁰ In other words, the act of founding is simultaneously an act of constitution and of exclusion, a setting of “worthy” as against “unworthy” goals. And because exclusionary, there is the ever-present likelihood that there will be some who reject the prevailing understanding of “citizenship” as arbitrary and “unconstitutional.” In allowing for gradual change and modification, the practice of augmentation mitigates this problem without solving it, for the very same quandary recurs here, too. Every augmentation is specific, one among a vast number of possibilities.

Arendt could claim to have escaped the paradoxes of founding because she underplayed the many ways in which politics and the world can be interpreted. Actions, she says, “possess an enduring quality of their own because they create their own remembrance,” but the problem here is that “remembrance” is not at stake, rather *remembrances* (HC: 207-208).

⁴⁰ An institutionalized promise must “to function as a foundation and a law, place limits on the freedom of all that follows it ... for it is always a *particular* law of freedom” (Keenan, 1994: 315).

The American Revolution proves a telling example. In Arendt's hands it appears as the collective project of an entire people conjoining in their difference to bring into being a shared polity. No mention is made of the Federalist strategy to limit colonial legislatures in favour of a consciously preferred centralized state or that the constitution was devised in secret.⁴¹ There is little mention, either, that the Mayflower Compact, the precursor of the Constitution, required for its success the deracination of native cultures (Keenan, 1994: 321). What Arendt offers is a "fable," a story whose purpose is to inspire future action, to empower (Honig, 1991: 97). The difficulty, however, with her empowerment is that it screens out the conflictual course of the Revolution. Had she not, she would have realized this event was as much about silencing voices as generating a new one and that such silencing lives on in dominant interpretations. Had she, as well, extended her frame of reference to include nineteenth century America, then she would have had to accept that particular conceptions of citizenship, of "separated" and "mediated" power, must subdue rival conceptions, even at the cost of war. Because partly fought over who could claim the title "citizen," the American Civil War shows law and its interpretation to be simultaneously relational *and* commanding, that the attempt to privilege the relational, as Arendt does, is mistaken.⁴² To legitimate power is to legitimate an "authoritative" interpretation, and, as the elimination of slavery illustrates, often properly. Constraint, the command "this far and no further!," is not therefore something secondary or incidental, requiring justification if the need arises, but actually bound up in the origin of polities themselves, their "very existence."

The same is true of judgement. Arendt thinks judgement "the most important activity in which ... sharing-the-world-with-others-comes-to pass" (*BPF*: 221). But because *discriminating*, deciding this is wrong, this good, this ugly, this beautiful, judgement and taste cannot be identified with friendship. Instead, in judging the judge decides who is to be classed a friend and who is to be considered an opponent, an adversary, or even an enemy.⁴³ Judging is never a simple matter of "being-with" but a complex process of simultaneously "being-for" and "being-against," wherein friendship and enmity are constitutively interconnected. Arendt's insistence on persuasion, communication and pleasure is, then, but

⁴¹ On her neglect of Alexander Hamilton's "drive for centralization ... and vision of a national economy presided over by a strong state," see Miller (1979: 181) and Wolin (1994: 298-299). On the far from "open" circumstances surrounding the drafting and ratification of the 1787 Constitution, see Hampshire-Monk (1992: 197-199).

⁴² In underplaying the "primordial crime" (*OR*: 71) of Black slavery during the Revolution, Arendt, as Benhabib (1996a: 160) observes, relegated to a parenthesis what would later almost destroy the Republic. On her failure to fully explore "constraint," see Morgenthau (1977: 127-131).

one side of a broader story encompassing prescription, reticence and displeasure. Despite one-sidedness, she does acknowledge this core conflictual dimension. Judgement “decides not only how the world is to look, but also who *belongs* together in it” and she was certain that Eichmann did not deserve to belong (*BPF*: 223, my italics). If so, however, she must accept there can never be a combination of equality and distinction without remainder, for some deeds and some actors must be considered beyond the pale. We claimed earlier (Ch 5, 7.I.i) that Arendt displays admirable sensitivity to plurality and contingency. This remains the case, but notwithstanding her laudable prioritization of “political culture,” her privileging of persuasive communicability over conflict comes unfortunately close to relinquishing an important feature of that plurality and contingency. Even while it resists speculative solutions to worldly problems, such as Habermas’ “ideal speech situation,” her account of founding and judgement itself presumes an impossible moment of “perfect legitimacy” where opposition and coercion do not figure (Honig, 1991: 106). Moreover, as with Habermas’ occlusion of “argumentative stalemate” (Ch 4.III.ii), this straining for perfect legitimacy occludes those temporally urgent moments where decisions and discriminations *have* to be made under conditions of staunch dissensus and with the risk that they might prove inappropriate or wrong.

The pressure of temporal urgency reveals the full scope of politics’ “enormous risk” (*HC*: 245). We will return to this question in Chapter Ten and, finally, Chapter Eleven, where a general account of Habermas, Arendt and MacIntyre’s failure to adequately thematize coercion, hostility and conflict is offered. To argue for re-thematization is not to revert to Weber’s political realism, which is similarly false in presuming but one underlying logic, but rather to make the mediating claim that politics is about speech *and* coercion, friendship *and* enmity. Standing between Arendt and Weber, this mediating view recognizes friendship as something to be cherished. It also recognizes, with Arendt, the central importance of promising and forgiving for political stability. But this goes hand in hand with an awareness of those moments where friendship is not possible. Whether a particular moment is of this sort cannot be determined by theory but only by actors in the myriad circumstances they, and no others, face. In according necessity to the social and freedom to the political, Arendt denies those circumstances and thus narrows the challenges faced by “good citizens” in the “wearisome processes of persuasion, negotiation, and compromise.”

⁴³ With Feldman (1991: 16), “good taste serves as a marker of distinction that separates classes, and what unites subjects is not a dialogic process of persuasion ... but rather a common experience of the “vulgar” which good taste struggles to overcome.” See also Kristeva (2001: 181-182, 224-225).

Our goal, consequently, has been to recover the complexity of intersubjective existence, to argue that the social is capable of freedom and the political sometimes constrained.

Conclusion

Our study of Arendt is now at a provisional end. We have established what is significant in Arendt, her awareness of contingency and risk and her substantive notion of citizenship, which vigorously contests both Weber's *Reichspräsident* and Habermas' privileging of civil society. Arendt is important, then, for stubbornly insisting upon a robust ideal of citizenship without denying the contingent fragility of political existence, the worldly care needed so that polities may endure. These together will inform our study of MacIntyre and the arguments of Chapter Eleven.

Yet we have also shown what is suspect in Arendt. Arendt's opposition of necessity and freedom, her performative account of action, and her ironic subjectivization of judgement, the basis of political ethics, must all be repudiated if an adequate comprehension of politics as both reality and ideal is to be achieved. In disrupting her bifurcations and uncovering false turns, we laid the basis for a broader critique linking up with earlier criticisms of Habermas. Just as in Habermas' response to Weber, reality is separated into emancipatory and fallen realms to produce a dualism that is not only false but also a covert surrender to the "iron cage," a denial of possibilities. With Habermas, as well, Arendt tries to exclude the strategic, enmity, from the authentically "political." The result is that her conception of citizenship and understanding of political risk are far less compelling than they might have been.

There is, then, both discontinuity and continuity between Habermas and Arendt, the continuity suggesting that their errors are not idiosyncratic but symptomatic of much theorizing which takes Weber's diagnosis of modernity as its starting point. Turning to MacIntyre, we will find this suspicion confirmed. Like Arendt and Habermas, MacIntyre divides reality into emancipatory and fallen realms and like them, too, he desires a politics free from the strategic and coercion. Mirroring the claims set out here and in Chapter Four, a key argument of the following will be that his thought suffers from contrary currents rendering it simultaneously radical and defeatist. But this is but one part of our goal. Despite his failings, some specific and some shared, MacIntyre yields valuable resources for thinking beyond Weber in those areas where he can be surpassed and for correcting errors engendered by Habermas and Arendt, just as they provide correction to his. MacIntyre's contribution is a partial one, but significant nonetheless.

Part III

Alasdair MacIntyre and the Politics of Virtue

Chapter 8

Introduction

Insightful and challenging, Alasdair MacIntyre proves an important figure in thinking beyond Weber. For this claim to gain credence, however, two recurrent charges must be addressed. The more prevalent is that MacIntyre is an eminently dispensable arch-reactionary who “fraudulently eradicates the problem of dominance” by surrendering Enlightenment universalism and the possibility of critique to the pre-rational authority of inherited practices and traditions.¹ Having broken with the “Enlightenment Project” MacIntyre cannot identify and address conditions of manipulation and injustice, and cannot therefore be considered a resource in combating either Weber’s decisionism or his reduction of politics to charismatic leaders. A less prevalent but graver charge is that because he has undergone such dramatic turns, once Marxist, then anti-Marxist, and now Thomist Aristotelian, his thought is so inconsistent as to render it useless to sustained attempts to theorize the present.² These charges together suggest MacIntyre has nothing coherent to say to modern theorists or actors and, even if he has, ought to be ignored.

Yet ignoring MacIntyre would constitute a real loss. Against his detractors, he is not reactionary but, like Arendt, combines conservative and radical themes. He is self-consciously radical in opposing Weber’s “iron-cage” and the liberal status quo not in the name of unreflective custom, as did Edmund Burke, but for the sake of a vision of human *flourishing* articulated in terms of intrinsically meaningful activities, *practices*, conceived in direct antithesis to instrumental dominance over or manipulation of citizens. Underpinning his virtue ethics is a universal conception of the human good providing a standard by which to critique the present, albeit one very different from the abstract universalism endorsed by MacIntyre’s liberal critics. Through engagement in practices actors extend their uniquely human powers and attain a coherent sense of self, the sign of a fulfilled or flourishing life. The extension of such powers or capabilities demands that they achieve independence of mind by continually questioning previous conceptions of human excellence to arrive at more complete, less narrow understandings. Because the institutional structures of modernity and

¹ Okin (1989: 71). See as well Nussbaum (1989: 36-41), Putnam (1992: 185-186), Holmes (1996: 93), Baier (1997: 277), Bellantoni (2000: 102) and, less aggressively, Bernstein (1986a: 134-138), Benhabib (1992: 76), Gutmann (1992: 131-133), and Frazer & Lacey (1993: 180; 1994: 275).

² Thus what apparently distinguishes “MacIntyre is not the number of beliefs he has doubted, but the number of beliefs he has embraced” (Gellner, 1974: 193, quoted in Ferguson, 1998: 109).

their philosophical underpinnings frustrate such questioning, or so he contends, MacIntyre understands his work as having not just corrective but also revolutionary potential.³

MacIntyre is conservative, on the other hand, in emphasizing the historical rootedness of all activity, that thought begins “unquestioningly with the unquestioned” (1999c: 315). Their identities constituted in large degree by inescapable historical circumstances, actors can reason and exercise their powers only when first educated into specific cultures. Every conception of human capability, justice, and rationality is therefore a particular conception which to endure must uphold its own standards, both educational and political. To neglect the need for authoritative standards, to believe instead in the fiction of a free-floating autonomous subject, is to repeat those errors of 18th century philosophy that gave rise to the extreme subjectivism of Nietzsche and Weber. It is precisely this emphasis on transmitted standards that leads many to dismiss MacIntyre as reactionary. But this dismissal ignores his equally trenchant insistence that to remain viable each culture has to attend to the best standards of capability, justice and rationality realized thus far and also to the never-ending challenges from rival systems of belief. The charge of reactionism holds, it will be argued, only if one ignores the “dialectical construction” and fallibilism central to MacIntyre’s account of how plural cultures and political traditions sustain themselves and engage creatively with others.

Against the second charge of gross inconsistency, it is clear that guiding MacIntyre’s work from the late 1950s to the present is the attempt to articulate the philosophical and political implications of that core ideal. MacIntyre’s turn from Marxism to Aristotelianism is less surprising than at first glance, for the simple reason that much of what he admired in Marx is what Marx himself drew from Aristotle, not least the distinction between use and exchange value, a stress on essential human powers, and the distinction between man-as-he-is and man-as-he-could-be if he realized those powers or potentials.⁴ Moreover, it is not simply that he now only accepts in Marx what first arose in Aristotle. In sharp contrast to Aristotle’s condemnation of *banauistic* crafts and hierarchization of human types, from slaves to free citizens, MacIntyre regards productive activities as genuine practices and endorses an universal-egalitarian theory of justice centring on Marx’s injunctions regarding desert and

³ MacIntyre is predominately pessimistic, yet he (1998: 235) does endorse Knight’s (1996: 896) reading of his work as a “revolutionary Aristotelianism” capable of legitimating the activities of plain persons so “that previously isolated struggles might be transformed into a new class war of attrition.” See also (1980: 178) where MacIntyre claims his and Gadamer’s “reinterpretation” of practice enjoins the “most fundamental form of change.”

⁴ Thus explaining the strong similarity between MacIntyre’s early and later critiques of liberal morality (1958: 41-44; 1994b: 223-229). On Marx’s indebtedness to Aristotle, see Nussbaum (1995: 119-120), McMyllor (1994: 46-73), Meikle (1995: 184-190), and O’Neill (1998: 28-30).

need. He remains convinced, as well, that Marx was essentially right in thinking moralities always give expression to particular social orders and that liberalism functions as an ideological cover for arbitrary sectional interests. Thus, despite disillusionment with orthodox historical materialism, the proletariat as a privileged class, and socialism's willing subsumption under bureaucratic nation-state politics, MacIntyre persists in understanding his project as a continuation of the spirit of Marxism by better means.

There have been significant turns, it is true, and a number will be sharply criticized, yet these render his thought neither any more incoherent than Arendt and Habermas' nor any less relevant. Indeed, for the purpose of this study MacIntyre's relevance consists in providing a pivotal correction of their rejoinders to Weber. Regarding Habermas, a central argument will be that MacIntyre's account of human capabilities or flourishing recalls Habermas' emphasis on non-pathological socialization as a central reference point for a critical theory of society. Both believe Weber erred in neglecting the intersubjective processes generative of individual maturity and both are certain that awareness of these processes has liberatory implications. We saw, however, that Habermas' account of socialization is gravely problematized by his separation of morality (right) and ethics (good) and his portrayal of the good in subjectivist, conventional, and utilitarian terms. Insofar as his theory depends foundationally on a notion of human socialization and this in turn depends on the ethical, Habermas' separations and subjectification of the good threaten a return to Weber's decisionism (Ch 4.II.i, 4.II.ii). MacIntyre's insistence, with Weber, that politics is foremost a substantive question of what people are and will become, that the good is prior to and incorporates right, and *yet* that conceptions of flourishing are amenable to rational debate promises to halt that return. A further significant feature of his work is its dialectical characterization of moral learning and change, which sidesteps Habermas's indefensible separation of justification and application and escapes the extreme abstraction and departicularization of political experience wrought by his ideal speech situation and Arendt's insistence on spectral disinterestedness (Ch 4.II.ii, 7.II.ii).

MacIntyre's most important contribution, however, is his non-dichotomous theorization of action, "purposeful performance." Where Habermas (Ch 4.III.i, 4.III.ii) sets the communicative off against the instrumental and Arendt (Ch 7.II.i, 7.III.i) the performative against the purposive, MacIntyre's teleological concept of practice combines these falsely dirempted elements into one, a combination due in part to his rejection of Aristotle's denigration of the productive arts. Because practices are bound by internal goods operating as self-sustaining intersubjective conditions *and* yet also directed towards ends outside themselves, MacIntyre is able to avoid Arendt's equation of work (*poiesis*) with instrumental

violence and Habermas' ascription of material reproduction to functional rationality, an avoidance reinforced by his critique of bureaucratic technicism and his defence of politics as a *phronetic* art. The results are considerable. Because knowledge or experience of ends and means is not substantively divided according to Weber's analytic separation of *Wertrationalität* and *Zweckrationalität*, reality no longer divides into the antagonistic binaries of lifeworld versus system or the social versus the political. MacIntyre thereby recoups "system" and "the social" as arenas of life intimately connected not just to the conditions of human potentialities but also to the very mode of their realization. Far from equating with "norm-free sociality" or neutral technical expertise, as Habermas and Arendt falsely contend, the economic and the material now become centrally ethical concerns.

Insofar as MacIntyre, on the level of theory, is aware of and tries to escape the tendency towards *ontological spatialization* in responding to Weber's monistic antinomy of the leader and machine, his perspective both arises within and poses a powerful reply to a key modern problematic. In this sense he is a squarely modern theorist, despite his espousal of the "classical tradition of the virtues." There are, nevertheless, serious shortcomings. The first has to do with MacIntyre's opposition of modernity and pre-modernity on the supposition that, in contrast to the more consensual foundations of pre-modern communities, the extreme conflictual nature of modern socio-political orders precludes an ethical politics. From this supposition he pessimistically concludes that hope rests solely on those marginal and embattled local communities which have successfully distanced themselves from the irredeemably corrupt politics of the nation-state and capitalist market. As will be seen, however, MacIntyre's depiction of pre-modernity is naively nostalgic in failing to consistently apply the "genealogical" tools he uses so cuttingly against modern societies. This inconsistency leads him to downplay his extensive philosophical and political indebtedness to modernity, but it also undermines his account of education and ethics. For if, according to his virtue ethics, actors come to an awareness of the good only through engagement in historically rooted practices, then such awareness becomes impossible when modernity, as MacIntyre portrays it, stands devoid of such practices. Yet if this were true, not only would education and ethics be deeply problematic, they would have ceased to exist.

The tension between MacIntyre's Aristotelian ethics and his dismissal of modernity is but one result of poor genealogical analysis. The more serious is that notwithstanding his non-dichotomous theorization of action, his pessimistic reading of modernity returns him to a position remarkably analogous to Habermas and Arendt's. In line with their partition of political space into fallen and emancipatory realms, he dichotomizes communal and state politics with the consequence that the antinomies circumvented by his theorization of

practice reappear. Over and above the substantial practical problems generated, such as how community and state interrelate in questions of distributive justice, this dichotomization ensnares MacIntyre within two paradoxes. The first he suffers with Habermas and Arendt, namely that he claims to deflate the pretensions of bureaucratic technocracy but in effect reinforces it. The second, specific to MacIntyre, is that while his conception of ethical change stresses the creative overcoming of crises and impasses, the political order he commends neglects the crises detected in modern politics. His ideal of local community urges instead a “politics of withdrawal.”

A second serious shortcoming stems from MacIntyre’s turn to Thomist moral realism. Underlying this version of moral realism is the belief that the virtues form a seamless unity, that moral dilemmas do not occur or, if they do, are the result of corrigible errors, and that the various goods pursued by human beings form a hierarchy, the ultimate good being contemplation of God. This form of moral realism, it will be argued, conflicts sharply and negatively with MacIntyre’s earlier defence of the reality of moral dilemmas, stress on human frailty, and assumption that flourishing admits of plural specifications. Furthermore, his insistence upon the goal of a perfected ethics as the realization of a monist *summum bonum* also undercuts the plurality of standpoints, fallibilism, and dialectical interchange that MacIntyre believes requisite if a genuine conflict of traditions is to occur. For the purposes of this study, however, two implications of Thomist realism are especially relevant. First, the supposition that there can be a perfectly ordered politics, each good finding its place in a stable hierarchy, suggests that MacIntyre’s ideal is one where politics as a serious endeavour has been surmounted. Spurred on by his reductive contrast between consensual pre-modernity and conflictual modernity, he therefore downplays the unpredictability and contingency definitive of political life, even though the fact of unpredictability occupies a primary role in his critique of bureaucratic technocracy. Second, and related to our earlier criticisms of Habermas and Arendt, the denial of fundamental conflict between genuine goods induces MacIntyre to attribute political opposition, strife, and compromise to the ruinous state of liberal politics. The politics of local community is, oppositely, a consensual politics where Weber’s polytheistic clash of rival gods and consequent emphasis on strategy and coercion have been rejected or overcome. Yet this easy opposition is compelling only if one believes that local communities could be devoid of clashes of interest or that such clashes could always be consensually resolved, something which MacIntyre’s portrayal of the conflict between the Sophists and the Socratic School in classical Athens roundly contradicts. Thus, in his desire to counter Weber’s equation of politics with coercion,

MacIntyre goes to the opposite extreme by denying *temporal urgency* and thereby occluding the real challenges faced by citizens.

Chapter 9

The New Dark Ages: MacIntyre on Bureaucratic Individualism and the Hope for an Ethical Polity

“... if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time” (*AV*: 263).

Ours is a “new dark age,” an unprecedented time of crisis and confusion. In the following we explain why Alasdair MacIntyre thinks modernity barbarous and his proposals for keeping barbarity in check. It is important to note, however, that our focus will be the entirety of his “*After Virtue* project.”¹ This period of MacIntyre’s work is certainly not without internal tension, but the difficulty with many critical appropriations is that their selective emphases occlude his over-riding goal, the liberatory attempt to show a path beyond the “iron cage” even while accepting Weber’s pessimistic diagnosis.

Thus, we begin with MacIntyre’s narrative of modernity and the “Enlightenment Project” (Ch 9.I.). Modernity is the age of the “individual” understood in separation from social and historical context. Abetting the move from pre-modern non-market to modern market driven societies, Enlightenment philosophy sought to ground this subject only to culminate in the debased “emotivist culture” identified by Nietzsche and his heir, Weber. The antinomy between instrumental managerialism and the irrational inner will that Weber perceived in this culture, and which in turn defines his work, impel the political structures of “bureaucratic individualism” (Ch 9.II.). These structures, the nation-state and capitalist market, claim legitimacy but are the agents of unprincipled power.

MacIntyre’s limited “grounds for hope” rest on an Aristotelian conception of the individual and practical activity (Ch 9.III.). This individual is rooted in socio-historical contexts and understands his and the common good through engagement in specific forms of intersubjective activity, practices. By entering into practices and adopting, questioning, and augmenting standards of excellence, individuals transform themselves and their community to advance their essential powers. But this transformative activity requires institutional structures threatened in advanced modernity. Only in local communities committed to the

¹ This project, MacIntyre (1991b: 269) makes clear, began with his late 1970s essays on social science and includes *After Virtue* (1981), *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988), *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (1990), and *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999).

virtues conducive to political deliberation can the human *telos*, flourishing, be achieved (Ch 9.IV.).

9.I.) Modernity, the Enlightenment Project, and Emotivist Culture

“Every action is the bearer and expression of more or less theory-laden beliefs and concepts; every piece of theorizing and every expression of belief is a political and moral action” (*AV*: 61). For MacIntyre the ascent of modern man and the rise of Enlightenment philosophy are therefore aspects of one and the same event. To better understand the present, he sets himself the genealogical task of unearthing the origins of this event. Unlike the Nietzschean “Genealogist,” however, MacIntyre’s goal is not to dispute the possibility of a rational politics, but to show that what has until now been thought “rational” is distinctly irrational, the result of momentous false turns in thought and practice.²

The decisive event heralding the modern subject is the appearance of modern capitalism. Weber’s study of the “Protestant Ethic” and Karl Polanyi’s (1944) analysis of the “Great Transformation” show that during the 16th and 17th centuries there came into being social and political structures radically different from pre-modern societies.³ From Homeric Greece to the Medieval period, earlier societies had understood the “individual” as embedded in wide social relationships and incomprehensible without reference to the expectations and obligations generated by these relationships. The pursuit of wealth, power, and status, what MacIntyre (*AV*: 188; *WJ*: 32) calls “external goods” or the “goods of efficiency,” was consequently kept in check by economic and non-economic institutions which presupposed the existence of a “common good” upheld by shared virtues of character, the “goods of excellence.” Turning inwards towards the self, Luther, Calvin and, later, Catholic Jansenism threw these relationships and the presupposition of a common good into doubt. No longer understood as dependent for its identity on social contexts and other historically rooted individuals, the individual-*qua*-individual became the source and arbiter of all value.

Of course, the Protestant reformers justified their turn towards the self on political and theological grounds. Politically, it represented a break with the injustices of a corrupt feudal culture. Theologically, there was no authority but scripture and it was the individual believer, not the Church, who bore ultimate responsibility before God. MacIntyre (1996b: 124) thus concurs with Weber that the initial impetus to change was understood primarily in

² Understanding modernity means constructing “something akin to what Nietzsche called genealogy” (1990c: 196), since rationality is rationality as envisaged within specific social structures, but not adherence to the “Genealogical” tradition advanced by Deleuze and Foucault, which confuses a historicization of “universal” and “true” with their dismissal (*TRV*: 205).

³ On MacIntyre’s indebtedness to Polanyi, see (*AV*: 239; 1984: 253-254; *WJ*: 211), McMylor (1994: 97-103), and Pinkard (2003: 178-180).

religious-ethical terms. Yet this new social order disrupted the bonds interlinking individuals. The individual being the sole site of value, these bonds had to be reconceived as existing *prior* to any social relationship, which meant the “common good” had to be replaced by a contract or agreement between individuals *abstracted* from their social circumstances. The basis of such agreement, in turn, could only be individual “desire,” with the result that social institutions were reconceived as instrumental means for the fulfilment of private interests (1994b: 228). Hence the realization of a key precondition of modern capitalism, the reduction of economics and politics to formal means-end rules which take no account of actors’ social relations. The Reformers’ efforts led, as Weber (*ES*: 93) saw, to a “capital accounting” that in “its formally most rational shape presupposes *the battle of man with man*.”

The processes of “disembedding” initiated by the turn towards the self led to the economic gaining unprecedented autonomy from wider society. But, and decisively, behind this autonomy and the formal rationality of market relations lay a substantive commitment to impoverished moral norms. For Weber (*PE*: 14-20) and MacIntyre (*AV*: 185) the figure encapsulating this impoverished normativity is Benjamin Franklin. Franklin believed the goal of the righteous to be salvation and he considered this a God-ordained duty. Yet his criterion of duty was not the common good or brotherliness but *utility*, material success. With time this injunction lost its theological referent and became crudely hedonistic, the pursuit of desire without reference to duty or God.

Prior to this eventuality, the great Enlightenment thinkers strove to ground the modern subject through impartial and objective secular moral principles. It seemed for a time that the newly arisen “educated public” in Germany and Scotland would succeed in this. Bound by a shared Protestantism and inhabited by a cultured class of civil servants, clergy, and the propertied, this public, Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere, appeared to have the unity and coherence requisite for rational progress. Yet its attempt at rational justification “was bound to fail” (*AV*: 52). Here we can offer only a broad sketch of MacIntyre’s narrative. The Enlightenment project necessarily failed because it inherited a once coherent moral scheme that had been fatally fragmented by the turn towards the self. Articulated first by Aristotle and enduring until the late Medieval period, this moral scheme comprised three interdependent elements: an understanding of untutored human nature, “man-as-he-happens-to-be,” an understanding of human potentiality, “man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature” or *telos*, and, finally, the principles of a rational ethics “which enjoin the various virtues ... [instructing] us how to realize our true nature and to reach our true end” (*AV*: 52-53). Man is here a “functional concept,” that is, a being whose nature it is to

achieve certain goods, to live *well*.⁴ To say that a particular man is a “good man” is, under this scheme, to make a factual statement about that person’s circumstances and character, to evaluate his success or failure in abiding by the precepts requisite for living well across his various roles as student, parent, craftsman, citizen, and believer. Ethics being the “science” enabling actors to understand how to move from their untutored state to their better nature, the precepts or principles of morality stem from and are unintelligible without orientation to man’s *telos*, *eudaimonia* or flourishing (*AV*: 52).

Animated by a profound scepticism and reducing reason to calculation, the effect of the Puritan inward turn was to eliminate reference to man’s *telos*, with grave consequences.⁵ As with Weber’s differentiation of value spheres, morality transformed into a *sui generis* enquiry divorced from the purposes and ends definitive of theology, law, politics, production, or aesthetics (*AV*: 39, 45). As the “moral” narrowed to a sense of duty abstracted from human well being, the understanding of man as a functional being having essential and normatively significant potentialities or ends was rejected. This meant, in turn, that the derivation of rational moral precepts from the potential nature of human beings, that because we *are* capable of friendship we *ought* to nurture this capacity, was no longer possible. “Ought” now deemed underivable from “is,” moral norms were no longer understood as factual statements but as injunctions, although the rationale of such injunctions, divine commandment, had also by now been rejected, leaving the source of their “unconditionality” radically unclear (*ASIA*: 171-172; *TRV*: 178; Anscombe, 1997: 31).

Most problematically, however, with the loss of an evaluatively significant *telos* an unbridgeable lacuna appeared between man’s untutored nature and the precepts of a rational ethics. Where once they took their sense from a perfected human nature, moral precepts could now only be grounded on man’s untutored nature, yet this “disobedient” nature is precisely what the precepts of a rational ethics are required to correct and cannot coherently provide their foundation. Thus, without the linking term of man’s potentialities, that second element of the old moral scheme, the relation between man-as-he-happens-to-be and the principles needed “to correct, improve and educate” him became obscure (*AV*: 55).

In response, Hume tried to ground moral precepts on human passions, but he could never convincingly explain why actors concerned with their own interests would opt to act altruistically. Reacting to Hume’s failure, Kant grounded morality on a human reason

⁴ Thus, “‘man’ stands to ‘good man’ as ‘watch’ stands to ‘good watch’ or ‘farmer’ to ‘good farmer,’” an evaluative relation of ends or purposes that can be assessed factually and rationally (*AV*: 58).

⁵ The “power of reason was destroyed by the fall of man [Calvin] ... it can assess truths of fact and mathematical relations but nothing more [Pascal]. In the realm of practice therefore it can speak only of means” (*AV*: 53-54).

divorced from passion and inclination. In the place of sympathy, he endorsed an abstract morality of rules underpinned by the categorical imperative as a universalization test which would separate moral from immoral injunctions, no matter the context (*AV*: 45-46, 236). The problem, one still faced by contemporary deontological theorists, is that his categorical imperative divorced moral reasoning from the contexts within which such reasoning takes its sense, rendered the relation between moral obligation and human well-being unintelligible, and failed to exclude the possibility of consistently willing to treat others as mere means, thus leaving him caught in Hume's quandary.⁶ Kierkegaard noted Hume and Kant's failures and sought instead to ground morality not on passion or reason but a fundamental act of choice lying "beyond all reasons" (*AV*: 42). This moment signals the end of the Enlightenment Project, for Kierkegaard thereby gave up all pretence of rational justification. It was Nietzsche, of course, who understood the full implications. If morality reduces to expressions of will, then morality is simply what my will creates. All else, the rational abstract self, rights, utility, is fiction, a cover for a supreme yet arbitrary decision. Like the 19th century Polynesian taboo system, the Enlightenment assurance in an impartial and objective morality amounted to a grand superstition (*AV*: 111-112; *TRV*: 185).

Hence the birth of late modernity's "emotivist culture." That this culture is Weberian is unsurprising, since Weber and Nietzsche "together provide us with the key theoretical articulations of the contemporary social order" (*AV*: 114-115). For MacIntyre three characteristics of this culture are decisive. The first is the appearance or, better, *perceived* appearance of a thoroughly "democratized self," a self which because it "has no necessary social context and no necessary social identity can then be anything, can assume any role or take any point of view" (*AV*: 32). But this self for MacIntyre, as for Arendt, means the extirpation of human identity, since when reduced to the inner will, identity becomes ethereal, infinitely malleable, a meaninglessness nothing. Meaninglessness is heightened, second, by the contemporary reality of interminable conflict and disagreement. Because Enlightenment thinkers failed to justify an independent secular morality, debate is necessarily fragmented between deontologists, consequentialists, and contractarians between whom, because their presuppositions are radically opposed, there is no possibility of consensus (*AV*: 8-7; 1983: 451; 1994b: 223). Emotivism as a moral theory gives vent to this reality by declaring all apparently impersonal reasons and arguments the expression of

⁶ MacIntyre's (*AV*: 43-49, 66-69; 1983: 449) critique of Kant and his successors, including Gewirth, Dworkin, and Habermas, is basically Hegelian in stressing the excessive rigorism, formalism, and motivational deficit of his theory. See O'Neill (1983: 390-392) and Bernstein (1986a: 137-140).

individual preference.⁷ But this means the obliteration of the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative interaction. When impersonal reasons collapse into personal inclination, “argument” can only be the attempt to influence and cajole others’ feelings (*AV*: 24). Weber’s failure to distinguish between belief in authority and *justified* belief in authority is therefore one instance of a much larger predicament. The dominant roles or characters of late modern culture, the manager, aesthete, therapist, and protestor, unite in treating others as instrumental means to unquestioned ends, the logic of capitalism.

These characters reveal the third characteristic of emotivist culture, its *compartmentalization* of actors’ roles and activities. Familial and private life are incompatible with work and work with political engagement, each sphere of activity having “its own role structure governed by its own specific norms.”⁸ Accustomed to thinking themselves dirempted or split selves, actors suffer *passification*, unable to achieve a critical awareness dependent on viewing life in its entirety and unable to see the conflicting demands of opposed spheres as not how things have always been but rather the sign of a problematically disjointed age. The true nature of this passifying compartmentalization is revealed and reinforced by Weber’s antinomy between leader and machine, which perfectly reflects the division of “fact” and “value,” “is” and “ought,” inaugurated by Protestant theology and modern science. On the one side, there is the individual who lords over questions of value, these questions being unamenable to rational criticism or debate. The private manifestation of value-irrationalism is the aesthete who lives to consume, whereas its public manifestations are the protestor who rants against consumption and the great man, Weber’s charismatic *Reichspräsident* or Lukács’ “ideal proletarian” (*SS*: 55; *AV*: 26, 262). On the other side, there stand the therapist and manager who claim competence over facts and “efficient” technique and who eschew consideration of “subjective” values. The therapist attends to the neuroses caused by compartmentalization so private individuals can subsequently all the better consume. The manager, differently, claims competence over public administrative techniques yielding the resources for consumption. These poles, private and public irrational individualism, private and public rational efficiency, together constitute the politics of “bureaucratic individualism.”

⁷ As a theory of the meaning of moral utterance emotivism is false, but as a theory of *use* it has plausibility, since contemporary moral utterance is often nothing more than the expression of preferences (*AV*: 12-15). See Mulhall & Swift (1996: 74) and Knight (1998: 7).

⁸ (1999c: 322). But see also (1977b: 217-237; *WJ*: 337, 397-398; 1992b: 193-199; *PP*: 235-236).

9.II.) Bureaucratic Individualism

The “crushing polarities” of modern society illustrate its underlying “paradox,” that actors think themselves “autonomous” but stand caught in dominative relationships rendering their freedom illusory (*ASIA*: 11; *AV*: 68). As the dominant terms of modern society, bureaucracy and individualism appear to conflict, the one concerned with collective utility calculations, the other with inviolable individual rights. Yet this apparent conflict hides a relation of mutual support, the opposed sides joined by the assumption that there are only two modes of social life, *either* one where the arbitrary individual choice reigns, *or* where managerial planning is sovereign (*AV*: 35). When MacIntyre attacks managerialism and the liberal nation-state he means to illuminate the self-deceptive nature of this assumption.

Managerial organization arose to accommodate the pressures of a nascent individualism. There had always been managers, MacIntyre (*SS*: 67) suggests, but in pre-modern societies they served traditions in which organizational authority had to justify itself by appeal to the religious and political ideals of these traditions. In modernity this relation is reversed; managers, not the communities or traditions they serve, determine the terms of justifiable authority. Weber’s “mechanized petrification” is therefore an apposite description of the present. Corporate and governmental bureaucracies claim justification on the basis of competencies not possessed by ordinary citizens. The ground of these competencies is an “aspiration to value neutrality and a claim to manipulative power” (*AV*: 86). Modelled on modern physics, managers’ value neutrality is achieved by eliminating actors’ subjective intentions and beliefs from their nomenclature and reducing analysis to quantitative variables. Their claim to manipulative power derives, differently, from a supposed ability to predict actors’ future behaviour derived from law-like generalizations generated on the basis of these quantitative variables (*SS*: 65). Managers demand recognition because they, unlike the emotional mass, possess the sober “objectivity” necessary for securing an efficient ordering of scarce resources.

This self-conception of civil servants, analysts, and social scientists conforms to Weber’s ideal-type of minutely regulated, hierarchical organizations administering to an entirely predictable world.⁹ Underlying is a presupposition of the “end of ideology,” the belief common among Weber’s heirs, but not Weber himself, that politics reduces to management because fundamental social conflict has come to an end. For MacIntyre,

⁹ MacIntyre (*SS*: 66) acknowledges that many managers would reject his characterization of their activity. His point, however, is not that managers fail to live up to Weber’s ideal-type, but that when managers *justify* their authority they do so in terms of this ideal-type. See McMylor (1994: 135).

however, this “end of ideology” thesis is itself ideological. It does, of course, reflect partial truths about advanced modernity, that it is dominated by managerial elites and that these elites possess power. Yet it is ideological in obscuring the conflictual nature of modern society and, more significantly, in parading as real competence a “masquerade” of competence (*AV*: 75).

MacIntyre employs two arguments to show the hollowness of managerial authority. His first is to deny the value neutrality of “effectiveness” and to question it as an ideal. “Effectiveness” is not neutral but a moral ideal buttressed by a peculiar metaphysics in which men are consumers and they work so as to consume. Man as a consuming being justifies in turn man as a managerial being, the latter’s manipulations designed to increase opportunities for consumption. But this ideal stands contested by the reverse, Aristotelian view that “what is essentially human is rational activity,” consumption existing to serve this activity as it manifests itself in work, leisure, and interaction (*SS*: 55). Here the justification of managerial manipulation, its claim as the only source of order, is ruled out, for when actors are not irrationally appetitive but instead rational they must be capable of ordering themselves. Managerial neutrality is therefore a chimera suppressing rival *ethoi* or moralities. Moreover, there is a deep tension within the manager’s self-conception (*AV*: 84-85; 1994b: 230). The manager regards his charges as behaving beings causally determined by predictable and pliant patterns. He regards himself, however, as an autonomous being exempt from the laws governing the manipulated, their behaviour moulded by his *conscious* intentions and purposes. As a moral ideal, managerial effectiveness legitimates the domination of man over man but this domination is internally inconsistent, swaying erratically between determinism and voluntarism.

If managerial neutrality is fraudulent, so too is managerial expertise. MacIntyre’s second argument hinges on *fortuna*, Machiavelli’s “bitch goddess of unpredictability” (*AV*: 93). Managerial expertise presumes the possibility of predicting future behaviour according to law-like generalizations, yet the inherent unpredictability and contingency of human life renders this expertise impossible. Unpredictability comes in many forms. There is, first, the reality of “radical conceptual innovation,” Arendtian “natality.” No one, for instance, could have predicted the invention of nuclear physics. To say nuclear physics will come into being, MacIntyre argues, one must also say what nuclear physics is. Yet in saying what nuclear physics is, one is not making a prediction but actually inventing nuclear physics here and now. Prediction of conceptual innovation in natural science is thus both conceptually incoherent and practically impossible.

The problem of unpredictability is even greater in the social sciences, for the reason that human agents are the focus and no one can reliably determine their future actions and decisions. Here MacIntyre points to everyday experience. If, as often happens, I have not yet decided between two mutually exclusive courses of action, I cannot say which one I will eventually take. An observer might try to predict my actions, yet he would be “unable to predict his own future in just the way that I am unable to predict mine,” and one important aspect of his future actions is their possible impact on my future decisions (*AV*: 96). But if he cannot predict the impact of his actions on my decisions, he cannot claim to predict actions at all. This problem is heightened in complex situations where observers must take numerous agents into account and face the related difficulty of defining what a particular action context is, whether a factory stoppage is primarily due to a conflict of employer and worker interests or whether union, party, or governmental interests also play a crucial role. In MacIntyre’s view, then, to think one can secure law-like generalizations governing the socio-political world is to presume an omniscience unavailable to human beings. The future is unknown and unknowable.

Managerial expertise is therefore a masquerade and its authority unjustified.¹⁰ When managers succeed their success is more often than not a matter of sheer luck and coincidence.¹¹ But if managers do not control social reality, then the basis of contemporary organization should be vulnerable to rival organizational schemes and ideals. Yet MacIntyre is decidedly pessimistic on this count. The problem is that managers have convinced themselves and “plain persons” that their expertism and authority are in fact real. That they might be instead a fictional cover for domination and sectional interest has fallen from view.

The same is true of liberal nation-states. Like Weber in his final years, MacIntyre takes a dim view of liberal parliamentary democracy, accusing it of perpetuating self-interested and ineffectual elites, but unlike Weber he spurns commitment to the “nation.” MacIntyre’s (1999b: 140) critique of the liberal nation-state, a “huge, single, complex, heterogeneous, immensely powerful something or other,” mirrors his critique of managerialism. The liberal state presents itself as neutral between conceptions of the good, but this neutrality hides a commitment to the emotivist self. This commitment, in turn, presents the liberal state with insuperable difficulties in its attempt to justify citizens’ allegiance to its structures and decrees.

¹⁰ The manager’s status is “fatally undermined when we recognize that he possesses no sound stock of law-like generalizations and when we realize how weak [his] predictive power ... is” (*AV*: 106).

¹¹ When “imputed organizational skill and power are deployed and the desired effect follows, all that we have witnessed is the same kind of sequence as that to be observed when a clergyman is fortunate enough to pray for rain just before the unpredicted end of a drought” (*AV*: 75).

Fundamental to liberalism is its privatization of value. Because no conception of the good can prove itself rationally superior, government's goal is to facilitate the equal satisfaction of subjective ends. The common good therefore transforms into "an artefact compounded out of individual and partial interest" (SS: 56). Citizens ought to obey the state because the state provides those external goods necessary for pursuing their ends. The liberal state is therefore structured according to a specific understanding of justice, which operates according to four levels of debate (WJ: 342-345). The first is that at which individuals forward preferences sustained by conflicting ethical presuppositions. Because rational agreement on these presuppositions is denied, debate at this level amounts to a ceaseless tussle of assertion and counter-assertion. Hence the need for liberal justice to abstract to a higher level of debate. This second level involves weighing and balancing utility and individual rights according to "fair" procedures and rules. As when Habermas (Ch 3.II) separates "morality" from "ethics," "right" from "good," liberal theorists hope a proceduralized justice will lead them beyond the pitfalls of subjectivism.

Yet procedures must themselves be justified, hence the need for theorizing a morality of rules. This third level of debate lends *prima facie* respectability to the neutral state by suggesting it enjoys philosophical foundation. The problem here, however, as with Enlightenment thought generally, is that there is no consensus on the ideals underpinning rules and procedures (AV: 252). Zealous libertarians contend with radical egalitarians and these in turn with moderates. The confusion marking the first level of debate therefore infects discussion throughout, including the fourth level of liberal justice, the formal legal system. Lawyers and judges are set the task of reconciling utility and rights claims, but in doing so can only appeal to the competing philosophical ideals articulated at the third level of debate, citing one at a particular juncture and thereafter its opposite.¹² They cannot invoke a shared morality, for none exists, but must instead impose temporary *modi vivendi* between antagonistic maxims. What appears rational is a mercurial melange of *ad hoc* compromise.

The liberal state, then, is sustained by an incoherent intellectual framework. This incoherence has serious repercussions, not least an increase in the passification effected by managerialism. When political systems seek to neuter ethical conflict, ethical debate loses its political status. This means the emotivist presupposition of liberal orders, man as a

¹² Our principles "express rival and incompatible social ideals and policies and ... furnish us with a pluralist political rhetoric whose function is to conceal the depth of our conflicts" (AV: 253).

consuming animal, is insulated from public criticism.¹³ Insulated, as well, is the true nature of liberal compromise. Liberal theory defends egalitarian principles but liberal practice consists in unequal competition between socio-economic factions, the state inextricably bound to capitalist imperatives. Those who are vulnerable inevitably suffer exclusion from the bargaining *fora* through which resources are appropriated (*PP*: 237). Seemingly pacific, liberal politics is in fact a “civil war” where the “goods of excellence,” justice, charity, and moderation, are systematically subordinated to the “goods of efficiency” and the vice of *pleonexia*, avarice (*AV*: 253).

It is here that the liberal state’s claim to justified allegiance unravels. When the state’s model of rationality is instrumental self-interest, when its core justification is its facilitation of individual desire, and when the common good is interpreted as an aggregation of individual interests, then it is rational for citizens to be “free riders,” to surreptitiously disregard its authority, so long as this better serves their interests and they can avoid penalties.¹⁴ Correspondingly, it is irrational to accept an unequal share of the costs upholding the state and its structures, as when soldiers, fire-fighters, or police officers risk their lives to maintain its order. This is especially so for those excluded from bargaining *fora*. To overcome these difficulties, the liberal state needs to develop interconnective bonds strong enough to encourage citizens to bear fair and at times demanding burdens. But this it cannot coherently do, since it is bound to an emotivist and aggregative conception of the good.

The allegiance enjoyed by existing states is consequently an allegiance secured by deceiving citizens as to the true character of the state. There have been attempts to rectify this character. Herder and his romantic successors re-envisioned the state as an ethical totality bearing the destiny of a singular, homogenous *Volk*. Although Weber condemned the quasi-mysticism motivating this view, it nonetheless endured in his understanding of Germany as a *Machtstaat* whose “fate” it was to “preserve and raise the quality of [its] national species” (*PW*: 16). For MacIntyre a similar line of thought guides present-day communitarianism.¹⁵ Yet the communitarian anti-neutralist rehabilitation of the state is doomed to failure in dangerous ways. Because of their immense size and oligarchic structure, states lack the public *fora* necessary for rational debate as to the common good.

¹³ “There is little place in such [liberal] systems for the criticism of the system itself, that is, for putting liberalism in question” (*WJ*: 392; *TRV*: 235). See Warnke (1992: 127).

¹⁴ See (*PP*: 242; 1995c: 225), Mulhall & Swift (1996: 94), Murphy (2003: 154-155), and Pinkard (2003: 188).

When states laud values as embodying the shared life of citizens, these values are not arrived at through open deliberation but imposed from above by political and economic elites substituting media hype and manufactured charisma for dialogue and argument. To believe the state a site of genuine political aspiration is therefore to further blind oneself to its inherent oppressiveness. Indeed, 20th century politics shows the result of thinking the state a “bearer of sacred values,” authoritarianism and terror (*AV*: 238; 1994a: 303). Endeavouring to correct individualism’s failings, communitarian adherence to a corrupt institutional form threatens a collective form of emotivism no less irrational, but far deadlier, than its individualist twin.

¹⁵ On MacIntyre’s understanding of the state as *Volksstaat* and rejection of communitarianism, see (1988b: 149; 1991a: 265; 1994a: 302-303; 1995b: 34-35; *PP*: 241; *DRA*: 132; 1999b: 141), Knight (1996: 891-892; 1998: 21), Ferguson (1998: 127), and Murphy (2003: 159-160).

9.III.) Transformative Practice and the Good of Human Beings

Unlike liberals, Weber and Nietzsche acknowledge the greatest political questions as concerning the “quality” of human life, the good to which it directs itself.¹⁶ Hence MacIntyre’s admiration for these thinkers. The problem, however, is that their value irrationalism impels the emotivist conception of man and practical reasoning, a change in thought which accompanied and augmented the modern market marginalization of those activities expressive of human excellence as opposed to avarice. The Aristotelian tradition, MacIntyre (*AV*: 117) contends, provides the only coherent alternative to that conception and marginalization. Articulated first in the Socratic School and finding expression in the New Testament, Aquinas, and, much later, 18th century Jacobin republicanism, Ferguson, William Cobbett, Jane Austen, and the early Marx, this tradition conceives practical reasoning as both *substantive* and *intersubjective*. It is substantive in that to reason is to direct one’s intelligence towards realizing goods or *teloi*. To “have a reason for action” means simply that one’s action is guided by and is intelligible only with reference to ends (*DRA*: 21-28). Teleological reflection or “purposiveness” is thus a basic feature of human beings, but this purposiveness is not identifiable with *Zweckrationalität*, instrumental reason. Instrumental reason concerns the calculation of means to given ends, whereas purposive reasoning in MacIntyre’s sense is both the determination of means *and* the evaluation of ends. Moreover, where instrumental reasoning is itself an antecedent means to the satisfaction of desires, purposive reasoning constitutes an integral part of achieving any good. Humans *are* rational animals, and part of their good therefore consists in exercising their rationality (*DRA*: 105).

If the capacity to reason cannot be identified with instrumental calculation, neither is it attributable to the isolated emotivist self. Aristotelian practical reason is intersubjective in two interrelated senses, one species-specific, the other socio-historical. The first stems from MacIntyre’s “moral realism,” the metaphysical contention that the facts of human nature are objectively knowable and evaluatively significant.¹⁷ MacIntyre (*AV*: 164, 196) had earlier rejected Aristotle’s “metaphysical biology” in favour of a cultural or sociological account of human *teloi*, but in later work he combines the two. Moral realism takes many forms, the later MacIntyre endorsing a strong Thomist version, but in general it dictates that because members of the species *homo sapiens sapiens*, human beings exhibit specific capabilities and

¹⁶ (*AV*: 118). In Weber’s (*PW*: 15) words, “we do not want to breed [material] well-being in people, but rather those characteristics which we think of as constituting ... human greatness and nobility.”

are directed to a determinate set of goods definitive of that species. These capabilities and goods, among which MacIntyre includes physical and mental well-being, familial and social interaction, emotional attachment, and imaginative curiosity, are not merely what individuals want but, as basic aspects of their functioning *well*, are common to all individuals prior to wanting or desiring.¹⁷ In a fundamental sense, then, practical reasoning is reasoning about a shared reality, not personal preferences or compartmentalized parts. Basic to this reality are two prime conditions of human life, the fact that all humans are *vulnerable*, finite, and yet despite this vulnerability are capable of achieving a specific sort of *independence*. These conditions are dynamically interrelated, our vulnerability necessitating dependence in childhood on those who are already relatively independent, parents or teachers, and these others aiding us in achieving a relative independence of our own. As MacIntyre (*DRA*: 77; 1999c: 316) sees it, independence of mind, the reflective ability to critique our desires, is humanity's highest attribute, yet this independence is a plural achievement arising out of interdependent "networks of giving and receiving." It is only attained, however, within temporally determinate circumstances, hence the second, socio-historical sense of intersubjectivity. Inherently social creatures, human beings come to awareness of their good within historical contexts structured by specific roles and upheld by particular networks of care. And understanding these networks requires understanding how everyday activities, our relations to others, the communities we find ourselves in, *and* the histories we inherit shape and are shaped by our ideals of the good.

MacIntyre's stress on vulnerability and interdependence recalls Habermas on socialization, the developmental processes culminating in personal maturity. Yet from a MacIntyrean perspective Habermas' division of morality and ethics, "right" and "good," is impossible, since without reference to human *teloi*, "man-as-he-could-be-if he-realized-his-essential-nature," theories of justice are condemned to the failures of Kant and Hume.¹⁸ Of course, Habermasian socialization has its own *telos* or ideal of flourishing, but his proceduralism leads to a minimalism at odds with the strong substantive assumptions of his personality ideal and reduces moral enquiry to the language of rules. For MacIntyre, however, rules are secondary to *virtues*, to the qualities of character motivating actors to obey principles and enabling them to cooperate.

¹⁷ Whether an "individual or group is or is not flourishing *qua* member or members of whatever plant or animal species to which it or they belong is ... a question of fact, even though the question of what it is to flourish has to be answered in part through evaluative ... enquiry" (*DRA*: 64).

¹⁸ (*DRA*: 63-98). For a similar account of good human functioning, see Nussbaum (1990: 219-226).

¹⁹ Unlike Habermas, MacIntyre tends to use the terms "ethics" and "morality" interchangeably. We will return to the relation between "ethics" and "morality" below (Ch 10.I.i).

From a virtue-ethical standpoint, morality is neither attention to the dictates of inner conscience nor action in accordance with principles of universalization, but rather the disposition to act in a manner that one's good and the good of others is realized (*AV*: 60; Hursthouse, 1997: 220). What this disposition entails, its constituent elements, can only be known in the concrete, hence MacIntyre's emphasis on *practices* or, in Marx's terminology, "objective activities." Whether architecture, music, farming, or politics, a practice is "any coherent form of socially established cooperative" activity in which the goods unique or "internal" to that activity are realized in the attempt to attain recognized "standards of excellence" (*AV*: 87). Thus defined, practices have three notable features. First, they are interpersonal and sustained by shared authoritative criteria. Entering a practice means subjecting one's "attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes to the standards which currently and partially define [that] practice" (*AV*: 190; *WJ*: 113-114). This process depends on an active dialectic of *acceptance* and *critique*, the learner taking on board existing standards and eventually critiquing these in a never-ending movement towards excellence. And one key part of this dialectic consists in acknowledging the role played by the "master virtues" of honesty, courage, and a sense of justice in maintaining cooperative endeavours.

Second, practices are neither to be identified with technical skill nor their internal goods equated with the external goods of money, power, or status. Against those who equate technical skill with blunt instrumentalism, it is essential to recognize that every practice involves the employment of skills. However, in practices skill and skilfulness are integrated within and subordinate to a wider performance or way of life directed towards over-arching goods. These sense-conferring goods undergo change with each reassessment of a practice's standards or purpose and necessitate the full exercise of human capabilities (*AV*: 193). In contrast to assembly line production or administrative divisions of labour, which reduce work to the repetitive execution of isolated tasks, practices require a broad proficiency irreducible to unequivocal maxims or law-like generalizations. Where managerial expertise is transmitted and assessed according to bureaucratically fixed criteria, practical knowledge or "modest expertise" is progressively acquired through habituation and reflection (*AV*: 107). Experience, what Aristotle called *phronesis* or "practical wisdom," and not official qualification, defines the competent practitioner.

The modern *zweckrational* subordination of internal to external goods is pernicious, MacIntyre contends, in tempting men to neglect their true capabilities and ends. Having no intrinsic connection to specific practices, external goods can be attained without broad knowledge or proficiency. Moreover, because "zero-sum" goods, when power, status, or wealth become the predominant social concern actors are induced to treat others as

manipulable objects. MacIntyre (*AV*: 196) takes care to note that external goods “genuinely are goods,” that practices such as fishing or farming are simultaneously directed towards internal and external ends, and that all practices require external goods to endure, a feature of his thought which will be emphasized (Ch 10.I.ii), yet the meaning of practical activity transcends products, power, or wealth. Hence the third feature of practices, their being activities where actors’ “achieve something of universal worth,” “transform and educate themselves through their own self-transformative activity” (1994b: 225, 231). Within practices actors do not just attain extrinsic ends but exhibit, actualize, and extend their innate powers. Action and work are here not something incidental, subservient to consumption, but fundamental *modes of being* in which individuals take hold of their lives. The means they deploy in producing art works or in ordering their political life are thus inseparably bound to the ends they hope to achieve.²⁰ One is not a worker or consumer, a generic figure, but rather a painter, farmer, or politician, a character whose exertions are not extraneous to but provide the bedrock of one’s identity.

MacIntyre and Weber (*PE*: 123) agree that modern occupational structures entail a “renunciation” of the “universality of man.” It is therefore a grave misreading to think MacIntyre a conservative or communitarian relativist, for motivating his thought is Marx’s hope for an end to “alienation,” the dissociation of humanity from its essential powers. Yet the non-alienated life is an integrated life, hence MacIntyre’s idea of *narrative unity*. In line with the socio-historical sense of intersubjectivity, for an actor to know his good, he must know how that good manifests itself in his various historically effected roles as son, father, citizen, craftsman, and believer. To know who one is to therefore to understand oneself as a whole, as having a past, present, and future. Indeed, the very intelligibility of human action demands this narrative form, since actions are incomprehensible, alien, without understanding the settings in which they occurred, the intentions of actors, and the ends they hoped to secure (1977a: 458-459). The implications of this narrative constitution of human life are far-reaching. To have an identity is to be one about whom a story can be told and to be able oneself to tell that story. Identity is therefore inextricably connected with the concept of accountability, the presupposition of intelligibility being that actors can recount and account for the circumstances, experiences, and causes underlying their intersecting life histories (*AV*: 218, 258; *TRV*: 196-197). The emotivist “democratized self,” where the

²⁰ The aim of practices “is never only to catch fish, or to produce beef or milk, or to build houses. It is to do so in a manner consonant with the excellences of the craft, so that not only is there a good product, but the craftsman is perfected through and in her ... activity” (1994a: 284).

individual dissolves into a succession of unconnected desires and events, is thus illusory and, when actually believed, a pathology abetting degenerate modes of practice.

Lives are incoherent and prone to injustice without some overall continuity between different practices, a sense of how the virtues should inform our actions across boundaries and between diverse others. Yet narrativity also entails a reconceptualization of political enquiry. When settings, intentions and purposes are basic to understanding social reality, it becomes impossible to sideline actors' understandings of their action contexts. The managerial and behaviourist hope for a quantitative political science is therefore absurd (*ASIA*: 264-279). When political scientists do attain real knowledge of the social world, their knowledge is similar in kind to that possessed by ordinary subjects, one that must necessarily include contestable concepts such as "legitimacy" and "illegitimacy." These concepts, likewise, cannot be conceived in value-neutral terms, but are inherently evaluative, the question of "legitimacy", as Habermas argued, being both a question as to whether actors believe an authority legitimate *and* whether in truth it is legitimate. As with political practice, the study of politics is an ethical endeavour.

Just as flourishing individual lives take the form of a "narrative quest," an underdetermined search for the best ordering of one's activities, so too do robust societies seek to coherently order their collective existence (*AV*: 220). Here the concept of *tradition* has application. The intelligibility of actions depends not only on their being identifiable within specific practices and the broader narrative of individual lives, but requires understanding these practices and lives as embedded within larger histories and inheritances. A vibrant tradition, MacIntyre argues, "is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition" as it is manifested in institutions such as universities, schools, hospitals, or political fora (*AV*: 222). MacIntyre therefore takes issue with Weber's (*ES*: 25, 36) characterization of the "traditional" as "ingrained habituation," a blind faith in "that which has always been." This Burkean account of tradition opposes authority to reason and extols pre-rational commitment above reflection.²¹ Here "tradition" functions as the flip-side of liberalism, Burke's conservative surrender to a statically conceived past the reverse image of the liberal subject's distance from all contexts, all inheritances. For MacIntyre, however, belonging to a tradition or historical community with shared standards and values is not inimical to reason but a fundamental condition of being able to reason at all. Liberalism is itself a tradition in this sense, but its individualism and faith in an atemporal rationality show it to be incapable of

recognizing communities as trans-generational projects (*WJ*: 326-348). MacIntyre's Thomism commits him to a belief in one true conception of reality, but he remains certain that the "real," the universal, only shows itself through history. The goal of rational enquiry is therefore not to escape tradition or community or even particularity, since to repudiate my past would be to "deform my present relationships" and sever myself from the well-spring of moral knowledge, but instead to overcome arbitrary and unjust limitations by endorsing the best conception of rationality, justice, and the good *thus far* articulated.²²

²¹ For MacIntyre's critique of Burke, see (1977a: 461; *SS*: 68; *AV*: 42, 221; *WJ*: 353), McMylor (1994: 159-160), and Gutting (1999: 97-99).

²² It is in moving forward from "particularity that the search for the good, the universal, consists. Yet particularity can never be simply left behind or obliterated. The notion of escaping from it into a realm of entirely universal maxims ... is an illusion" (*AV*: 221; 1994a: 289; *TRV*: 64).

9.IV.) The Politics of Local Community

MacIntyre's ideal is of citizens socialized within cultural networks comprising roles that enable, rather than inhibit, their capacity to reason in concert. Balanced between dependence and independence, these citizens belong to an "educated public" bound by shared norms and directed towards common ends, a public wherein enquiry is conducted rationally and without manipulation.²³ Yet because no commonly accepted standards now exist, the chance for a society-wide educated public is also non-existent. More gravely still, with the barbarians already within our gates, attempts within the confines of the state to reverse the passification of citizens all tend towards "collaboration" or "degenerate into terrorism" (1991a: 265; *AV*: 109). As MacIntyre sees it, Weber (*PW*: x) was right to believe modern mass revolutionary endeavour fated to augment managerial organization or dissipate in "bloody carnival."

There is some room for hope, however. The alternative to emotivism is a communal politics organized towards the common good. As opposed to preferences or sectional interests, common goods are those "that can be mine only insofar as they are also those of others" (*DRA*: 119). An Aristotelian politics therefore sets itself the threefold task of *nurturing* the conditions of human flourishing, vulnerability and independence, *facilitating* those diverse practices in which flourishing manifests itself, and *advancing* communal ideals through reflective critique. So conceived politics is an activity "through which other types of practice are ordered so that individuals may direct themselves towards what is best for them and for their community" (*PP*: 241). Its goal is the provision of the institutional means necessary for engagement in science, art, family life, or non-alienated production. MacIntyre takes care to distinguish practices from institutions. The practice of medicine or education is concerned with the internal good of health or knowledge, whereas hospitals or universities are hierarchical bodies overseeing the procurement of material and other external goods. Because structured in terms of power and status, institutions often corrupt the practices they claim to support. But while institutions do frequently corrupt, "the making and sustaining of forms of community ... [that is] institutions ... *itself has all the characteristics of a practice*" (*AV*: 194, my italics). An Aristotelian politics is an institutional *praxis* where power and status are subordinated to the furtherance of practitioners innate powers, thus realizing the internal goods of civic friendship and communal independence.

²³ For the idea of "educated publics," see (1987a: 16-19; *TRV*: 216-217; *DRA*: 156-157; 1999c: 318-322; 1999d: 245-264; 2002: 16-17).

MacIntyre's strongly perfectionist vision recognizes the need for *differentiating* arenas of life and defends a private realm defined by strong discretionary rights.²⁴ Yet, to disrupt modern compartmentalization, the need for protective boundaries must not occlude the fact that the spheres of individual, family, and communal life are interdependent. An optimally integrated community, one escaping the binary of liberal fragmentation and romantic collectivism, is impossible without certain fundamental conditions being fulfilled. Because the exercise of reason is a presupposition of achieving any good, communities must first institutionalize forms of inclusive public debate so that a "common mind" can be attained. In contrast to Weberian elitism, a genuine politics includes all those concerned or affected within the processes of opinion-formation *and* decision-making. Cogent action requires citizens to fundamentally agree on their purposes, implying a large degree of shared culture, yet this culture is maintained through deliberative argument (*PP*: 241). Furthermore, for the common mind to be oriented toward the common good, the positive enactment of law must be founded upon rational ethical norms.

Although MacIntyre (*AV*: 192-193) has long argued for cross-cultural "master-virtues," his later work comprehends these under the nomenclature of natural law. Natural reason and its exceptionless precepts arise jointly out of our being educated into traditions or "languages-in-use" *and* our basic capacity for thought. So that speech be meaningful, some basic commitment to "conversational justice" must exist between deliberators in public fora. The virtues of truthfulness, listening, and openness to refutation are not external constraints upon but conditions of enquiry and criticism (*DRA*: 111). Those who reject these conditions and the shared narratives underpinning networks of care destroy the very tongues that allow public deliberation to occur. Criticism and dissent are paramount, the indicators of a robust society, but when unlimited they destroy all chance of securing the good. The task, then, is to walk the path between *suppression* and *disruption*, something that relies not on general proscriptions but the character of each case (1999b: 134). Communities are justified in ignoring those who maintain long discredited views, phrenology or phlogiston theory, and excluding those who despite all evidence continue to deny events such as the Holocaust or engage in racist tirades. As voices from the outside hostile to the living ties of communal interdependence, they can never "participate with us in rational conversation, criticism, and enquiry."²⁵

²⁴ On differentiation, see (*PP*: 248; *DRA*: 109; 1999c: 322). See (2002: 11) for MacIntyre's defence of the parental right to choose a particular form of education.

²⁵ (*DRA*: 165). See also (1987a: 23-24; 1999b: 148, 151-152) and Porter (1993: 528-530).

The urge to participate arises, of course, from the reality of conflict. Practitioners find themselves within received contexts of value and established claims to authority, but these contexts and claims are continually challenged by novel experiences of inconsistency and contradiction occurring to those within a tradition and by claims forwarded by rival traditions. When received verities break down in moments of conflict or “epistemological crisis” there is no recourse to an “encyclopaedic” point of view, since every conception of justice, rationality, or the good is a particular conception with a determinate history (1977a: 453; *WJ*: 361; *TRV*: 173). The Enlightenment belief in a transcendent reason, entirely transparent to any rational agent whatsoever, is an illusion. A plurality of traditions or “languages-in-use” exists and the presuppositions of these traditions are often incommensurable, untranslatable into the vocabularies of their rivals. MacIntyre therefore recognizes the possibility of fundamental conflict in communities oriented to the common good, but this conflict does not, he insists, vindicate Nietzschean relativism or the liberal privatization of value.

MacIntyre’s metatheory of “traditions-in-conflict” or “the rationality of traditions” argues that communities can overcome internal and inter-communal conflict through a dynamic process of *dialectical construction* (*WJ*: 100, 358; 1990c: 190). To prove their commitments rational, actors must imaginatively enter the conceptual and linguistic world of rival perspectives. Having acquired a “second-first-language,” an internal understanding of their rivals, actors can then compare these perspectives to their own and assess whether they better explain reality, are less contradictory, more adequate to experience (*WJ*: 374). In this interchange three outcomes are possible. A tradition may show itself rationally superior to its rivals, as when Newtonian physics triumphed over Aristotelian physics.²⁶ There may be a melding of traditions, as when Aquinas combined Aristotle and Augustine. Or, finally, stalemate may result, a situation of enduring conflict currently beyond rational resolution. But even when a tradition proves itself superior, its superiority is always *provisional* and fallible, vulnerable to future interpretations. This is especially so with ethical matters, where the knowledge concerned is necessarily inexact, of a *phronetic* rather than theoretical kind (*AV*: 159). Thus, in contrast to the aspirations of managerial expertise, “there is and can be no finality” (*TRV*: 125).

It will become clear (Ch 10.II.ii) that MacIntyre’s theory of dialectical construction is far from unproblematic, that in combining it with Aquinas’ insistence upon a hierarchically

²⁶ A tradition is rationally superior when through conceptual innovation it *resolves* problems in ways others cannot, *explains* why these problems occurred, and in all this *maintains* a continuity with its own intellectual and moral inheritances (*WJ*: 362; *TRV*: 120).

ordered universe, a monistic *summum bonum*, and a perfected deductive science, his thought succumbs to internal tension.²⁷ This tension arises in part from his (*WJ*: 165-166, 179-188) repudiation of themes defended in *After Virtue*, the (*AV*: 157-163, 178-180) Sophoclean claims that human *teloi* do not form a seamless whole and that the virtues often conflict, leaving actors in ethical dilemmas. For the time being, however, it is important to recognize that despite his turn to Thomist moral realism, MacIntyre continues to believe communities attain maturity only by subjecting themselves to dialectical interrogation.²⁸

A further condition of Aristotelian communities, one enabling the institutionalization of participatory fora, is the co-existence of two principles of distributive justice, *desert* and *just generosity* (*DRA*: 130). These are embodied respectively in Marx's injunctions regarding, on the one hand, socialist society, and on the other, the ideal society of communism. Between able bodied independent practical reasoners, each should receive according to what he has given and *deserves*. Yet, between the able and the unable need takes precedence, each now giving what he can and receiving, insofar as possible, what he *lacks*. This distributive structure presumes a market form which does not simply reward on the basis of satisfying uninterrogated economic demand (1985b: 245). Committed to the ideology of economic growth for its own sake and demanding high labour mobility, capitalist markets disrupt interpersonal bonds, condemn the vulnerable to tedious or dangerous forms of labour, and reduce education to the acquisition of saleable skills (*DRA*: 145). Genuinely free markets, instead, do not treat productive activity as a mere means but as an intersubjective mode of self-transformation.²⁹ These markets, in other words, require embedding in non-market relationships found only in the space lying between nation-state and family, those relatively self-sufficient, small-scale local communities "within which the activities of families, workplaces, schools, clinics, clubs dedicated to debate and clubs dedicated to games and sports, and religious congregations may all find a place" (*DRA*: 135).

In this space usually called civil society, a term MacIntyre (1994b: 223, 234) is loathe to use for largely Marxist reasons, plain persons can decide as to their ends free from the deceptive cant of modern parliamentary democracy. This does *not* mean, however, the intended death of the nation-state. Although radically opposed, committed to each other's subversion, members of local communities should circumspectly acquire from nation-state

²⁷ It is worth noting that this internal tension characterizes his later Thomist writings, when from *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* onward he emphasizes dialectic and fallibility and yet defends the possibility of complete and perfect comprehension of the cosmos.

²⁸ "Only those whose tradition allows for the possibility of its hegemony being put in question can have rational warrant for asserting such a hegemony" (*WJ*: 388).

functionaries those public goods which they themselves cannot provide, security against external threat and material resources procurable only through large-scale organization. This licences an “*ad hoc* participation” in governmental structures premised on the realization that such participation is strategic or instrumentally appropriate (*PP*: 252; 1994a: 303). Here MacIntyre makes a key claim. Liberals neglect that a politics limited to ensuring individual security lacks proper authority, is vulnerable to free riders, and is blind to the intrinsic worth of political life, but they are certainly right to fear states which present themselves as the guardians of sacred values. Thus, while castigating the liberal claim to neutrality, MacIntyre (1999b: 144) nonetheless argues for an “ostensible neutrality” of states, for even though such neutrality is “never real, it is an important fiction, and those of us who recognise its importance as well as its fictional character will agree with liberals in upholding a certain range of civil liberties.”

State neutrality must extend even to Holocaust denial, for when states try to defend values they end up destroying them.³⁰ Under modern conditions, only communal politics can defend truth against revisionism or arrive at rational value consensus. For MacIntyre it is therefore clear which realm has primacy. Community is the sole site of political aspiration and the legitimate determination of needs; the nation-state has purpose merely to the extent it satisfies those needs and holds back from imposing its own ethos or rationality. If it refuses to hold back, if it blunders into the space of the “face-to-face encounters and conversations of local community,” then plain persons have leave to fall back on their natural reason and emulate the “revolutionary struggles of the past that broke down barriers to achieving modern citizenship” (*DRA*: 142).

Inimical to the state and capitalist market, Aristotelian communities rely upon goods internal to citizens’ activities, to their lives in general, and upon a market of uncoerced participation which is about profit *and* the wider relationships of loyalty, respect and goodwill that should exist between producers and their patrons. An avowedly “utopian” understanding of the potential of community life, certainly, but MacIntyre (*PP*: 252; *DRA*: 143) claims there have been groups and organisations, Donegal farming co-operatives, Mayan towns in Guatemala and Mexico, Welsh mining communities, and numerous fishing villages, which have more or less realised this ideal. Yet *no* utopianism should occlude the truth that without the virtues local communities are no better than the most bureaucratised

²⁹ As MacIntyre (1958: 39, my italics) once put it, “the economic basis of a society is not its *tools*, but the *people* co-operating using these particular tools in the manner necessary to their use.”

³⁰ As exemplified, in MacIntyre’s (1999b: 143, 151) view, by the disastrous effect state embodiment had for the practice of Irish Roman Catholicism.

and callous of nation-states. The essence of our personal and communal good lies *not* in community, whatever communitarians might think. Rather, it rests in the virtuous relationships at work within networks of giving and receiving. The relationships *constitutive* of our identities have also *dominative* aspects. Therefore we have to recognise that “institutionalised networks of giving and receiving are ... always structures of unequal distributions of power, structures well designed both to mask and protect these same distributions” (DRA: 102). It was by retreating from the virtues that barbarity arose, and it is only by returning to the virtues that barbarity can be held in check.

Chapter 10

Engaging MacIntyre: Flourishing, Modernity, and Struggle

The preceding explored MacIntyre's repudiation of bureaucratic individualism and his ethical-political ideal. Here we interrogate that ideal, first by assessing its positive dimensions. Flourishing is recovered as a primary political concern but in avoiding the pitfalls of Habermas' theorization of the good MacIntyre prevents a return to Weberian decisionism (Ch 10.I.i). This is complemented on the metatheoretical level by a dialectical characterization of change, which rejects Habermas and Arendt's abstract departicularization of ethical experience without succumbing, as liberals charge, to authoritarian conventionalism. MacIntyre is most significant, however, for a non-dichotomous theorization of political practice or "purposeful performance" that recovers "system" and "the social" as centrally ethical arenas (Ch 10.I.ii).

There are notable deficiencies, nonetheless. The first consists in his suspect contrast between consensual pre-modernity and conflictual modernity, which obscures MacIntyre's own modernism and threatens to undercut his Aristotelian account of ethical life (Ch 10.II.i). Led astray by this binary, MacIntyre surrenders the gains of his non-dichotomous theory of practice by opposing local community to the politics of the nation state, thus implicating himself in the ontological spatialization performed by Habermas and Arendt (Ch 10.III.i). A second deficiency arises from his Thomist moral realism. This version of moral realism spurs MacIntyre to contradict elements of his thought and to downplay the possibility of a non-compartmentalized, non-subjective pluralism, which is inadequately distinguished from emotivist pluralism (Ch 10.II.ii). More seriously still, Thomism and poor genealogy together culminate in a denial of fundamental conflict between genuine goods and the ineradicable role opposition, struggle and compromise play in all politics (Ch 10.III.ii). Thus, although MacIntyre differs greatly from Habermas and Arendt, his thought ends in quandaries strikingly akin to theirs.

10.I.) MacIntyre's Significance

10.I.i.) Flourishing and the Good

The “quality” of human beings secured by socio-political orders provides the ultimate standard of judgement and to ignore it is to pacify debate (*PW* 15; *PP*: 236-237). In this MacIntyre and Weber concur, yet MacIntyre sees “quality” not as characteristic of isolated selves but possessed by individuals whose identities are constituted through engagement in activities with others. Stressing the intersubjective grounds of a maturity defined by independence and vulnerability, he strongly recalls Habermas on socialization and non-pathological development. But Habermas’ theory is problematic. We saw that he misunderstands the critical fountainhead of his work by subordinating ethics to morality and arguing for an untenable proceduralism (Ch 4.II.i). This failing is compounded by his inconsistent refusal of teleological accounts of ethical life, which, when coupled with his equation of the good with conventional, subjective, or utilitarian categories, concludes with a surreptitious reassertion of Weberian decisionism (Ch 4.II.ii).

MacIntyre shows a path beyond these problems. As regards the relation between morality and ethics, he acknowledges their different referents without resorting to subordinating diremptions.¹ In determining just behavioural expectations morality lays down what ought not be done by placing an obligating barrier between inviolable individual or collective competencies and oppression. In seeking out the contours of the worthy life, ethics, instead, locates those competencies warranting such protection in the first place. As MacIntyre sees it this difference in no way justifies Habermas’ prioritization of right over good, for right or justice is incomprehensible without there being something deemed *worthy* of protection. The very fact, he argues, that human beings, because human, are deemed to require privacy in order to live successfully is reason to uphold and maintain a sphere of interaction protected by private liberties. Determination of the boundaries of private life therefore begins and concludes with evaluations of the significance privacy should have in the structure of diverse lives. Here good is prior to right, yet right is *not* subordinated but itself forms a constitutive part of the good, for in laying down obligatory rules we are also saying that without obedience to these rules there can be neither excellence nor *eudaimonia*.

¹ MacIntyre (*WJ*: ix) also rejects those feminist perspectives opposing right to good, justice to virtue. As articulated by Gilligan (1982: 64-105) and Baier (1997: 263-277), the problem with such views is that their separation of “masculine” justice from “feminine” care perpetuates the oppositions definitive of Habermas’ morality and ethics divide. See Hursthouse (1997: 220-221) and Statman (1997: 28-30).

(*AV*: 151; *TRV*: 139). Justice is not grasped in abstraction from human goods or ends and thereafter superimposed on life plans, but arises and is understood in pursuit of such ends.

Because justice remains unintelligible without reference to human well-being, to opt for moral proceduralism over ethical substance is to err. MacIntyre's analysis of "conversational justice" is, of course, an analysis of the procedural dimensions of rational enquiry. But these dimensions are underpinned by substantive commitments which place firm checks on what can be said or done (1999b: 146). MacIntyre therefore concurs with Rawls' critique of Habermas (Ch 4.II.i). Yet he also surpasses critique. Not only does conversational justice presume the substantive ideals of independence, reciprocity, and reflection, but these ideals in turn presume a general account of good human functioning.

MacIntyre, we saw, breaks with liberal individualism in asserting the irreducibly social nature of independence, the fact of its dependence upon roles in which the ability to question is nourished by fragile interpersonal and institutional structures. Politics' task is to ensure the continuity of these structures. But this task cannot be performed without adequately understanding what people are capable of being and becoming, the ends they pursue. Hence the importance of MacIntyre's teleological analysis of practices. Because human capabilities and ends become known solely in their actualization, this analysis provides a concrete reference-point to assess whether activities are free and have meaning. Negatively confining attention to "damaged life," Habermas finds himself unable, like liberals, to speak of the positive, non-alienated "standards of livability" motivating his theory (*MCCA*: 205; *TCA*, II: 394). Attending to the internal ends of education, work, and political engagement, MacIntyre rejects Habermas' ban on teleological reflection to recover these fundamental standards. This recovery enjoins a firm rebuttal of subjectivist, conventional, and utilitarian categorizations of ethical issues. Utilitarian categorization is ruled out by the distinction between "good" and "mere" functioning. Maximizing preferences taken as given, utilitarianism fails to distinguish between internal and external goods, reducing all desire to the latter (*AV*: 63-65, 198-199). This reduction means it is at best an uncritical theory of "mere" functioning limited to calculations of material distributions and conceptually blind to the distinction between reasoned and irrational desire, real interests and self-deceptions. Thus, appreciation of "good" functioning demands more than attention to the preferences of actors or the quantitative material resources they possess, important though they are, but sensitivity to *qualitative* questions, whether these resources enable actors to lead fulfilling lives, whether their various roles are enhanced or impeded by specific distributive patterns (*PP*: 250).

Qualitative judgements of this sort exclude subjective categorization. Assimilating ethics to self-clarification and doubting that ethical conflict can admit of rational agreement, Habermas submits to Weber's battling gods. Yet because practices are located within intersubjectively established, historically rooted, and intersecting narratives and traditions, ethics cannot rest on subjectivity alone, whether individual or conceived as some macro-subject. Subjectivity, awareness of oneself in action and the motivation to act, is intrinsic to ethical experience, but that experience incorporates a history and standards of excellence *not* at the disposal of individual wills. Entering into a practice to achieve enduring goods involves the gradual internalization of standards of excellence which relate to practitioners not as preferential options but as the very grounds of their being able to participate in that practice at all.² Indeed, our analysis (Ch 4.I.i) of Habermas' intersubjective alternative to decisionism, Weber's preoccupation with "inward calling," confirmed this. Without motivation to partake in science or architecture these practices cannot be appreciated, but lack of motivation on the part of particular individuals does not mean that science or architecture cease to endure as tangible components of a social existence guided by interpersonal criteria. The "fundamental unit" of ethical life is "persons-in-social-relationships," not the person in communion with himself (1995a: 358).

Ends and standards therefore *stand over* individuals whilst at the same time emerging from their interactions. There is a further reason for rejecting subjectivism, however. As MacIntyre sees it, to identify the good with hermeneutic self-clarification, the authenticity of a "shared form of life or collective identity" (Habermas, 1999c: 24), is to fall guilty of a conservative narcissism. If understood exclusively as self-clarification, ethical discourse degrades into narcissism in the sense that its core referent becomes oneself or one's community, not oneself or one's community in relation to others. It is prejudiced towards conservatism, on the other hand, insofar as this referent is determined by *our* past, what we alone have experienced, and not the experiences of different forms of life and their implication for our future interactions.³ This misportrayal occludes the critical element of ethical discourse, the fact that it *challenges*, rather than simply explicates, given identities. Ethical discourse goes beyond self-explication to enquire whether identities are worthwhile, whether they serve equally all they purport to serve. In other words it poses the problem of the common good. This problem includes interpretations of *needs* and collective *goals*

² MacIntyre (1991a: 261; 1994b: 233). Hence the untenability of Bernstein's (1986a: 131) claim, repeated by Okin (1989: 46), that MacIntyre concludes with the "decisionism" that he finds so objectionable in Nietzsche and Weber."

³ As can be seen from Habermas' (1994b: 107-148) debate with Taylor, where his tendency to subsume ethics under the conservative rubric of "cultural preservation" is pronounced.

relating not only to the norm of authenticity but, more fundamentally, to the ideals of independence and community. A prime example, for MacIntyre (1994a: 289; *DRA*: 3-4), is the feminist rearticulation of womanhood. Critiquing received views of women's capacities and wants, feminists made public their experience of repression to contest theretofore unproblematic conceptions of the common good, which had been a good common only to men. Their struggle therefore derived less from a will to self-clarification than a wish to educate others into the suffering of a specific group so as to alter shared socio-political frameworks.⁴ Furthermore, in condemning the status quo they called for agreement as to the accuracy of their rearticulation of needs and goals, thus directly contradicting Habermas' (*IO*: 55) denial that values or goods can attain the level of acceptance achievable by moral norms.

Lodged within ethical discourse, then, is an "utopian" element demanding acknowledgement of genuinely common, as opposed to sectional, goods (MacIntyre, 1996: 81; Cooke, 1999b: 186). If so, our argument disputes conventionalist as well as subjectivist portrayals of the ethical. Although inescapably beginning with received understandings, feminism's critical impetus derives from an exploration of how such understandings *distort* women's capabilities. Key to their project, consequently, is a distinction between essential capabilities and prevailing conventions. But in making this distinction feminists commit themselves to asserting, as MacIntyre does, a revised concept of human nature, presuming in turn the moral- or ethical-realist claim that there are knowable truths about human beings, one such truth being that women are not biologically or emotionally predisposed to a household existence. Habermas (Ch. 4.II.ii) rejects realist claims on account of his erroneous assumption that realism presupposes an external point of view by which to definitively disclose humanity's essence. Although seriously problematic, as will be argued (Ch 10.II.ii), MacIntyre's realism denies the possibility of external "encyclopaedic" perspectives, averring, with Nussbaum, that human nature can only be known from *within* as "the most fundamental and broadly shared experiences of human beings living and reasoning together" (Nussbaum, 1995: 121; MacIntyre, 1994a: 301).

We come to know who we as humans are not by attaining the impossible "objectivity" sought by the managerial sciences, but through multifaceted processes of dialectical questioning. Because this questioning always begins within specific contexts there is no

⁴ To quote Cooke (1999b: 180-181), ethics is not simply the "explication of collective value-orientations or self-understandings but also ... the articulation, and struggle for recognition, of particular (group) needs and ... goals." Cooke also makes clear that insofar as Habermas (*BFN*: 418-427) defends feminist critiques of liberal and welfarist legal paradigms, he presumes a conception of ethics irreducible to authenticity.

possibility of separating justificatory from applicatory discourses or achieving the privileged point of view definitive of Arendtian spectators. Contra Habermas, to know what is just and good one must first have experience of the just and good, a concrete awareness of their actualization that precedes theoretical justification.⁵ Thus MacIntyre concurs with our arguments against differentiating first-order universal norms from second-order particular applications (Ch 4.II.ii). Contra Arendt, to be able to think at all one must be located within a *polis* or community, and this necessary location means that reflection takes its leave primarily from our role as participants, not spectators (*WJ*: 122-123). Distance is required for practical understanding, yet because temporally rooted and dependent on our embodiment in real communities, this distance is never autonomous but rather a heteronomous achievement heavily dependent on theoretical and practical resources originating in others.⁶

MacIntyre's critics level two serious accusations here. First, despite his desire to uncover capabilities and proper ends, because MacIntyre concentrates upon given practices and their internal standards he concludes with a disguised form of conventionalism insensitive to those processes of change "generated by debate *across* traditions and on the basis of values *external* to prevailing cultures."⁷ He therefore lacks the criteria necessary for exposing "evil practices," oppression. Second, and on account of his implicit conventionalism, he stands guilty of subordinating critique and reflection to the prevailing authorities of community and tradition.

Close attention to MacIntyre's thought as a whole, rather than focusing on partial elements, shows these accusations to be misplaced. As to the charge of authoritarianism, if MacIntyre did subordinate reflection to authority then he would suffer Weber's inability to differentiate *de facto* belief in legitimacy from justified belief. Yet his metatheoretical account of the traditions-in-conflict presumes the possibility of so differentiating. For a tradition to remain viable it must engage dissenting standpoints that are in key respects incommensurable with its presuppositions. This engagement implies the recognition of conflict and the imaginative ability to learn "second-first languages" so as to enter into the experiential world of rival groups and ascertain whether they escape the tensions afflicting

⁵ "When I speak of learning what our common good is, I am ... referring to how we acquire practical knowledge of the good, not the mastery of some theoretical formulas, but the acquisition of a directedness towards the good embodied in our everyday practice" (*DRA*: 135-136).

⁶ "Nothing can claim exemption from reflective critique, but well-founded reflective critique can never be disengaged from [the] contexts of practice" (1994a: 289).

⁷ Fraser & Lacey (1993: 144, my italics; 1994: 275-276). See also Okin (1989: 43), Barry (1989: 160-168), Nussbaum (1989: 40), Markham (1991: 259-267), Coleman (1994: 82), and Holmes (1996: 113, 263). These accusations are directed at both his Thomist and earlier non-Thomist periods.

one's own position (*WJ*: 374, 398). But because the process of dialectically interrogating rival beliefs presupposes a plurality of viewpoints and the fallibilism of all claims to authority, the charge of authoritarianism cannot be sustained.⁸ Authoritarianism entails the suppression of conflict and difference, whereas MacIntyre (*AV*: 163-164, 277; *TRV*: 201; 1991a: 262) acknowledges the role these phenomena play in augmenting the common good.

There are difficulties with MacIntyre's understanding of conflict and plurality (Ch 10.II.ii, 10.III.ii), but clearly he believes legitimate authority to be authority having withstood the test of reflection. That MacIntyre's account of traditions-in-conflict relies upon a dynamic between acceptance and critique is also reason for discounting the accusation of conventionalism. It is simply untrue that he limits critique to criteria internal to practices, not least because this limitation would reinforce the vice of compartmentalization and contradict his broad avowals regarding need and desert.⁹ Moreover, whether one conception of a particular good is superior to others can only be determined if the practice in question is understood in terms of its impact on human lives taken as a *whole*, their narrative unity in the context of many practices and roles. Guided by the presupposition that clashing goods can be integrated and not just traded off against each other, change and the possibility for critique take on a sophisticated character within MacIntyre's thought. There is, first, the conflict that arises *within* practices as to their internal goods or meaning, whether the end of teaching is to foster culture or to transmit specific expertise, for example. This conflict is compounded by the conflict *between* practitioners and the institutions in which they find themselves, their Church or union, since "even the best of such institutions is always corruptible ... and it would be difficult to exaggerate the harm resulting from such corruption" (1994a: 290). Practitioners must also harmonize as best they can the competing demands of *distinct spheres* of life, of work and family, ambition and responsibility, so that their lives attain a passable balance. And, finally, the *traditions* and *histories* they inherit are not monological, but riven with contradictory claims which they have to assess for themselves using careful judgement and reason.

To MacIntyre's mind the meaning of human activities is never static and what is evil justly deserves to disappear. The ultimate standard for judging political orders is whether they enable essential human powers, including the power of reflection. Although every

⁸ "No one at any stage can ever rule out the future possibility of their present beliefs and judgements being shown to be inadequate" (*WJ*: 361). This fallibilism commits MacIntyre, as Porter (1993: 523) notes, to "the virtues of tolerance, respect for pluralism, and openness to revision and change."

⁹ This is a frequent criticism (Scheffler, 1983: 446; Frazer & Lacey, 1994: 274; Miller, 1994: 256), despite the fact that his (*AV*: 275; 1994a: 284; 1999c: 315-321) account of flourishing depends upon the three-fold framework of practices, individual narratives, *and* traditions.

assertion of the good is rooted in a particular context, the task of ethical enquiry is to move from partial to genuinely universal conceptions of flourishing.¹⁰ Thus MacIntyre breaks with conventionalism in asserting a universal human “function” or *telos*, that human beings seek to become the best that they can be. This *telos* entails increasing control over the conditions and ends of one’s life, but a control dependent upon engagement with others, never their domination.

10.I.ii.) Experience, Purposeful Performance, and Institutions

Aversion to Weberian *Herrschaft* also unites Habermas and Arendt, but their differing articulations of the political generate considerable problems. Habermas’ “ideal-speech situation” abstracts from concrete experience in a manner mischaracterizing non-dominative relations of authority and expertise as inherently oppressive (Ch 4.II.ii). Arendt’s concept of “performative action” renders political endeavour obscure by detaching it from purposes, consequences, and intentions, an obscurity reinforced by her separation of determinate knowledge, truth, from indeterminate reflection, opinion (Ch 7.II). The dangers of these turns are clear. Without explicating the role expertise plays in political life, we risk surrendering politics to Weber’s leaders and bureaucratic elites, whose authority is legitimated precisely in terms of expertise. And without incorporating purposes, consequences, and intentions within an intersubjectively conceived *praxis*, we risk surrendering these primary concepts to Weberian *Zweckrationalität* and its connotations of monological violence.

It is certainly true that MacIntyre (1995a) has gradually come to a greater appreciation of Habermasian arguments regarding conversational justice and “performative contradictions.” But it remains a decisive feature of his thought that universal norms can only be understood *in medias re*, in actually living the particularities of one’s life. This concretization implies not only the inseparability of justification and application but also the realization that abstractly construed norms, such as Habermas’ process rules 3.1-3.3, represent a crude shorthand for a very complex reality.¹¹ Unlike mathematics ethics is not an accurate science, and unlike mathematics, too, it does not reduce to a series of fundamental

¹⁰ Without “moral particularities to begin from there would never be anywhere to begin; but it is in moving forward from such particularity that the search for the good, for the universal, consists” (*AV*: 221; 1983: 462-463).

¹¹ Hence his rejection (*TRV*: 46) of Habermas’ “neo-Kantian thesis that allegiance to one specific set of ideal norms is a necessary condition of acts of communication.” To characterize ethical life in this way is to subordinate it to theory.

formulae or principles (*WJ*: 114-115). Hence the significance of the intellectual virtue *phronesis*. The ability to discern what is appropriate, good or just in specific action contexts, *phronesis* or “practical wisdom” is acquired through long processes of learning and struggle. Although awareness of universal goods and rules is a part of such wisdom it is but one part, the other being experience of particulars. And as the experience of particulars, *this* context, *this* problem, *phronesis* is governed by no fixed rules but is, instead, the fundamental ability to apply rules within novel situations.¹²

The importance of MacIntyre’s argument here is that in recalling Aristotle’s critique of Plato it illuminates a conspicuous lacuna in Habermas’ thought.¹³ Aristotle reacted against Plato’s Philosopher-King and “pessimism about the social world” to defend ordinary citizens in the real world (*AV*: 147; *WJ*: 90-93). Likewise, MacIntyre defends the *phronetic* knowledge of ordinary practitioners against the “generalized other” inhabiting Habermas’ “ideal-speech situation.” Concentrating on ideal procedures this situation occludes a key element of any defensible claim to authority. Whether proper procedures have been followed is insufficient to ascertain legitimacy, for participants in debate must also possess competence and experience in the problem area concerned. But insofar as there are many problem areas, as many as there are practices, argumentative validity is itself a multi-dimensional concept. To recognise this is to accept that the particularities of any one practice will alter the norms appealed to. It also means accepting inequalities of competence between citizens deemed equal before the law. In drawing attention to epistemic inequality, MacIntyre makes explicit what Arendt and Habermas assume.¹⁴ It is wrong, however, to understand this as a return to Weber’s separation of active elites and passive masses. Understood in terms of practices, competence cannot be possessed by a well-defined elite sealed off from the mass, but must be seen instead as the varying possession of many practitioners who abide by shared standards of excellence. Although there are excellent, poor, and mediocre painters, the practice of painting is open to all, should they pursue it. Thus there exists a strong contrast between managerial or therapeutic elites whose authority derives from an ideological monopoly over esoteric methods and authoritative practitioners, for the latter are always vulnerable to critical evaluations from those being educated into a

¹² Political wisdom cannot “be embodied into a method which can be taught, precisely because the maxims relied upon are open-textured and open-ended, and the sense of when which maxim is relevant cannot itself be unpacked into a set of maxims” (*ASIA*: 275). See Gadamer (1989: 317).

¹³ The analogy between Plato and Habermas is also drawn by Benhabib (1990b: 332).

¹⁴ Although ignoring the question of differing competence, Habermas’ (*MCCA*: 116-188) differentiation between preconventional, conventional, and postconventional consciousness places extremely demanding cognitive and emotional requirements on citizens. Arendt (*OR*: 279-280) is far more explicit, arguing for the birth of a new political elite to replace professional politicians.

practice. Furthermore, because politics, unlike painting or journal writing, is basic to man, *zoon politikon*, as such, the goal of an ethical polity is the facilitation of political capabilities in all citizens and not just their cultivation in extraordinary individuals.

MacIntyre therefore tries to correct liberal insensitivity to variations in experience and authority without succumbing to elitism. There will certainly be exceptional individuals, but they are recognized as exceptional only on basis of standards shared with “plain persons” who themselves possess practical wisdom (*DRA*: 140). Attention to the content and form of that wisdom also reveals the indefensibility of Arendt’s concept of *praxis*. Fundamental to the MacIntyrean theme of narrativity is that an act is *intelligible* if and only if we can ask of actors the reasons why they undertook it or attribute to them such reasons.¹⁵ But this condition of intelligibility requires attention to the context of action and actors’ intentions, the purposes they hoped to achieve (*AV*: 206-207; *ASIA*: 244-259). It is by reference to contexts and intentions that, let’s say, mural painting is distinguishable from vandalism. Moreover, only by comparing avowed intentions with eventual consequences can we determine whether actors are telling the truth as to their intentions, whether they were themselves confused as to their purposes, or whether *fortuna* intervened to produce unanticipated good or ill effects.

Together these conditions of intelligibility show that to downplay intentions, purposes and consequences is to marginalize those criteria by which action is distinguished from unreflective or insane behaviour. Two weighty ramifications follow. First, once purposiveness is understood as central, then Arendt’s opposition between *poiesis* and *praxis* crumbles. That opposition relies on an equation of purposiveness with technical work and work with violence. MacIntyre breaks this inferential chain whilst shunning the blunt instrumentalism underlying Weber’s *Zweckrationalität*. Instrumentalist or technicist conceptions of action are feasible solely on the assumption that action is entirely predictable and reduces to the execution of technical skills. MacIntyre, we saw (Ch 9.II, 9.III), possesses powerful arguments against that assumption arising from the fact of *fortuna* or unpredictability, but he is careful not to devalue the possession of skill and knowledge. Practices are quintessentially intersubjective activities whose meaning goes beyond skilfulness to incorporate the realization of specific ends, yet this realization is impossible

¹⁵ “To identify an occurrence as an action is ... to identify it under a type of description which enables us to see that occurrence as flowing intelligibly from a human agent’s intentions, motives, passions and purposes” (*AV*: 209).

without the employment of skills.¹⁶ Skills or *technai* constitute, as Aristotle argued, the subordinate but nonetheless integral means to achieving internal and external goods.¹⁷ Inserting technical skills as constitutive elements within an inclusively conceived *praxis*, MacIntyre thereby effects an analytic melding of the value-rational and instrumental-rational which prevents the identification of action *either* with mere instrumentality *or* pure performance. He accomplishes this, as well, without relinquishing the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative activity. All worthwhile goods are attained in company with or through reliance on others and this necessary relatedness takes two rudimentary forms, a virtuous relatedness where others are treated with regard or a vicious relatedness where they suffer debasement into objects.

There is a key distinction to be made, consequently, between crude instrumentalism and a reflective *praxis* incorporating *techne* in a humane, non-objectifying manner, the “purposeful performance” of which we spoke earlier (Ch 7.II.i). The second ramification of MacIntyre’s argument is equally important. Asserting the significance of purposes, skill, and knowledge means that the political can no longer be understood in Arendtian terms as inhering in retrospectively perceived “moments” or “events.” As with his metatheoretical description of traditions in “epistemological crisis,” MacIntyre understands politics as the resolution of conflicts and impasses so that common goods are enhanced rather than impaired. This enhancement presumes a *prospective* application of hard-won experience requiring deliberation, knowledge of facts, and careful preparation. To limit the political to epiphanic moments is therefore to neglect the sequences of forethought and cooperative effort culminating in those moments. Similarly, because the “creation and sustaining of human communities,” the political is not autonomous from other spheres of activity, as Weber and Arendt contend, but overlays these spheres to determine their scope and boundaries (*AV*: 187-188; *PP*: 241). A “master-practice,” it overlays in the sense of providing or withholding the institutional sustenance required by every practical activity. A consequence, however, of emphasizing institutional sustenance is that politics must now be understood as the simultaneous pursuit of internal *and* external goods. Actors achieve internal goods insofar as they expand their deliberative capacities and *phronetic* knowledge through ever-wider experience of conflictual situations in the company of others. Increasing

¹⁶ “What is distinctive in a practice is in part the way in which conceptions of the relevant goods and ends which the technical skills serve --- and every practice does require the exercise of technical skills --- are transformed and enriched” (*AV*: 193).

¹⁷ It was Aristotle’s “explicit statement that practical intellect (*phronesis*) governs (*archei*) productive intellect. And *phronesis* not only supervened on *techne ab extra* ... but also could be an intrinsic element in the exercise of the *techne* itself” (Dunne, 1993: 364).

independence, awareness of proper ends, and civic friendship are the result. They achieve external goods or the means of institutional sustenance, differently, insofar as they secure the wealth, power, and recognition of status needed to maintain the practice of teaching or nursing, for instance. A politics neglecting either type of good is bound to fail, for without external goods there can be no independence and without internal goods and the virtues required to achieve them the pursuit of money or power concludes in avarice.¹⁸

But if stark oppositions between *praxis* and *poiesis* cannot be sustained and if politics concerns both ideal and material interests, then there is no possibility of an ontologically spatialized political reality. Thus Knight's (1996: 895; 1998: 293) claim that MacIntyre's distinction between practices and institutions recalls Habermas' dichotomy between system and lifeworld, or Arendt's between the social and the political, rests upon a fundamental misunderstanding. Simply put, MacIntyre does not believe practices and institutions opposed, for there can be no practice which is not institutionalized. Rather, his core argument is that *particular* institutional forms guided by *specific* conceptions of human nature and rationality lead to the corruption of practices. These forms and conceptions were abetted by changes in ethical self-understandings from Aquinas to Hume, Kant to Nietzsche, and thereafter to emotivism and romantic collectivism. Conceiving individuals as part of a *Volk* or reducing them to rational egoists, the institutions of the nation-state and capitalist market adhere to conceptions of humanity and consequent practical *teloi* that undermine institutions directed towards human flourishing. It is neither systemic de-linguistification, as suggested by Habermas' metaphor of "uncoupling," nor ontological conditions run amok, Arendt's basic thesis, but perverse ethical understandings and misapprehensions of institutional ends which alienate human beings from their essential powers.

Thus the critical focus of MacIntyre's thought is on clashing institutional orders and their discrepant practical rationalities, not opposed spheres or realms. This refusal to theoretically dichotomize reality has profoundly salutary effects. To the degree that all institutions, no matter how malformed, are guided by ethical ideals, there cannot be a realm of "norm-free sociality" or mute "necessity" (*TCA*, II: 258; *OR*: 114). Habermas' ascription of material reproduction to systemic integration and Arendt's relegation of labour to animality are therefore obfuscating and highly uncritical turns. They obfuscate in downplaying the integral contribution of material reproduction and labour to human self-

¹⁸ Miller (1994: 250) castigates MacIntyre for focusing upon the internal goods of "self-contained" practices such as chess at the expense of those "purposive practices" such as farming which serve external "ends beyond themselves." MacIntyre sometimes encourages this view, yet his (*AV*: 194, 196; *WJ*: 35; *PP*: 240, 249; 2002: 4) analyses of politics and the genuinely free market stress the necessity of pursuing internal and external goods together.

understanding (1994b: 226). Labour and the economic have pronounced impact on the narrative unity of individuals' lives, shaping not only their hopes and aspirations but also their bodies, and were they to fall under the sign of a norm-free latent functionality actors would lack freedom in an arena definitive of who they are. Yet for MacIntyre the economic is as open to conscious intervention as the political and it must, accordingly, be the goal of communities to encourage a market form and "occupational structure" which uphold rather than destroy networks of giving and receiving (*WJ*: 105).

Habermas and Arendt's principal error is to believe that there could be realms *properly* defined in terms of latent functionality or necessity, where ethics has less relevance than questions of efficiency or bodily imperatives. Thus the Habermasian (*TCA*, II: 339) claim that system's uncoupling from lifeworld entails a positive evolutionary advance in social complexity has to be rejected. For MacIntyre systemic interpretations of economics or administration are theoretically baleful, disguising as laudable the impoverishment of *integral* lifeworld activities. The task, then, is not to push back "colonization" of lifeworld by system, all the while respecting the dirempted logics of these opposed arenas, or to prevent the social melding with the political, but to recognize *and* to recover system as intimately part of lifeworld and the social as intimately political. To Arendt's (Ch 7.I.ii) call for a full realization of citizens' decision-making powers he therefore adds the demand for a full realization of practitioners' productive powers, a demand surpassing Habermas' quietist "sluice-model" and Arendt's more radical injunction to de-expropriate citizens' property. The latter are uncritical in either equating productivity with quantitative resources or lodging it in the hands of putatively neutral administrators. A matter of identity, quantitative resources are inseparable from the qualitative interpretations attaching to them. Likewise, neutral administration operates as a value-bound myth to suppress alternative understandings of political and economic organization that might oppose the ideology of bureaucratic authority and its concomitant, the great charismatic personality. Habermas and Arendt begin by critiquing technocracy but insofar as they surreptitiously reinforce it, their thought (Ch 4.III.i, 7.III.i) stands implicated in Weber's worldview. A stoutly critical perspective would instead usurp or significantly alter that worldview. MacIntyre's (Ch 9.II, 9.III) arguments as to the impossibility of technocratic expertise and defence of *phronetic* knowledge, that "modest" expertise drawing inductively from lived experience and denying the prospect of pronouncing law-like generalizations, furnish this requisite perspective.

MacIntyre is significant for recovering ethics as the central category of a non-decisionistic politics without concluding in authoritarianism or conventionalism. Weber's polytheistic

vision of battling gods, each to be chosen according to the depth of passion animating one's soul, is but one understanding of ethical life and gravely inadequate at that. An adequate understanding necessitates attention to the interpersonal processes by which ethical and practical knowledge is gradually amassed and employed. But the form and content of such knowledge and the actions issuing from it recognize no theoretical boundary on the pursuit of *eudaimonia*. The whole of human life, from the home, the workplace, to the debating chamber, is the proper subject of political deliberation.

We will see, however, that MacIntyre's idealization of local community unfortunately undermines his non-dichotomous theory (Ch 10.III.i). But before exploring why we must first consider some weighty philosophical problems. His celebration of consensual pre-modernity over conflictual modernity is not only contradictory, insofar as he relies on modern philosophical resources, but also destructive of his account of practical learning. That account is further problematized by MacIntyre's later endorsement of Thomist moral realism, a philosophical perspective disavowing the possibility of an objective plurality of the good.

10.II) Philosophical Perplexities

10.II.i.) Modernity and Nostalgia

Modernity is the context within which MacIntyre writes, but he spurns that context, convinced of its corruption. Weber and Trotsky rightly despaired of the chances for genuine revolution, for the dominant social forms would condemn revolution either to collaboration with the status quo or atrocity (*AV*: 262). The best achievable is the maintenance of local communities free from the interminable conflicts of mass liberal society and hostile to the modern philosophies perpetuating those conflicts. Embodying the pre-modern classical tradition of the virtues, these communities yield the sole site of resistance to the subordination of the goods of excellence to the goods of efficiency.

This temporal contrast is undoubtedly vivid and dramatic but nevertheless untenable for a number of reasons. The most obvious is that MacIntyre's thought issues from and is incomprehensible as anything other than modern philosophy. As he himself admits, Aristotle had no sense of the historicity of human endeavour and thus no understanding of "tradition" (*AV*: 146, 277). MacIntyre's anti-Burkean concept of tradition presumes the fundamentally modern recognition that erstwhile infallible metaphysical frameworks and ethical ideals were in fact the fallible and sometimes pernicious standpoints of historically rooted communities, a recognition spurred on by the Reformation, the various republican revolutions, and the counter-critique of these events by social conservatives, on the one hand, and socialists, feminists, and anti-colonialists, on the other. It is unsurprising, as well, that the idea of dialectical conversation between incommensurable epistemic positions recalls Popper on refutation, Kuhn's analysis of scientific revolutions, and Hegel's vision of increasingly more adequate and comprehensive syntheses or solutions to theoretical and practical problems.¹⁹ Moreover, the practice of modern, as opposed to classical or medieval, science proves a paradigm of robust rational enquiry (*WJ*: 134, 363; *TRV*: 118). But if modern science is an exemplary practice, if Popper and his critics provide key theoretical resources, and if the study of specific moralities and their practical rationalities necessitates a historicization of argument reminiscent of Nietzschean genealogy, then MacIntyre's

¹⁹ Hence MacIntyre's (1977a: 453-472) attempted integration of Popper, Kuhn, Michael Polanyi, and Lakatos, four squarely modern philosophers of science. See Stern (1994: 150-153) and Gutting (1999: 107). On MacIntyre's relation to Hegel, see (*WJ*: 360-361, 1987b: 134), Warnke (1992: 117-118) and Graham (1994: 161-174).

resuscitation of the “tradition of the virtues” is a peculiarly modern revival employing philosophical means quite alien to pre-modern thinkers.²⁰

MacIntyre’s partisanship for pre-modernity therefore collapses, at least on a philosophical level. But there is a more pressing reason for doubting this all too easy opposition. Modernity, we are told, is especially fragmented, an era where “politics is civil war carried on by other means” (*AV*: 253). Here factional will-to-power has triumphed over will-to-consensus and the common good. In truth, however, MacIntyre’s understanding of 20th century politics exhibits striking parallels to his portrayal of ancient Athens. The “dilemma” facing Plato and Aristotle was that “*either* the life of the reasoning human being can be shown to have its *arche* ... *or* the sophistic and Thucydidean view of human reality prevails” (*WJ*: 83). This Thucydidean view, subsequently expressed by Thrasymachus and Alexander, is remarkably analogous to the views of Hobbes and modern political realists, that justice reduces in the end to a question of superior strength. Indeed, Hobbes is Thrasymachus’ “heir,” as are those thinkers, Weber, Lipset, and Bierstedt, who argue “it is only important for [rulers] to be thought to be just” (*WJ*: 98; *ASIA*: 278, my italics). Plato and Aristotle’s rejoinder, that justice demands the exercise of right reason, respect for *arche*, and virtue, is also analogous to the rejoinder propounded by modern deontological and other explicitly ethical schools on domestic and international politics. The tension between the goods of excellence and the goods of efficiency is therefore not unique to the modern age but originates in Greek politics, the supposed *locus classicus* of citizenly virtues. And as with modern societies, where local communities now fight rearguard actions against the near omnipotent nation-state and market, Aristotle’s *polis* was challenged and eventually overcome by Alexander’s despotic empire.

This conspicuous structural symmetry between ancient Athens and modern politics also informs MacIntyre (1996: 61-83) on medieval politics. From the 13th century jurisprudential conflict between imperial law as defended by Frederick II, ecclesiastical authority as upheld by Louis IX, and natural law as envisaged by Aquinas it is clear that the high Middle Ages had not secured broad ethical-political consensus. The problem then as now “was how to educate and civilize human nature in a culture ... torn apart by the conflict of too many ideals,” a conflict showing nascent signs of what would later become modern “compartmentalization” (*AV*: 165; *WJ*: 206). There is sufficient reason, then, to discount the

²⁰ This leads Giorgini (1989: 269), Porter (1993: 525), and Ferguson (1996: 118) to read MacIntyre as a liberal, pragmatist, or even postmodern thinker. Although that conclusion needs careful qualification, it is assuredly true that orthodox Thomists (Haldane, 1994: 99-105; Coleman, 1994: 80-88) unite in rejecting his thought.

claim that modernity is especially conflictual. But insofar as MacIntyre both acknowledges these historical facts and yet claims for pre-modernity a strong unity of purpose and outlook, he stands guilty of perpetuating a myth of past homogeneity.²¹ This nostalgic myth-making has two unfortunate effects. The first is that his genealogical unearthing of the origins and unjust implications of modern modes of thought is unaccompanied by an equally rigorous analysis of pre-modern social forms. MacIntyre repeatedly condemns Aristotle on labourers and women and Aquinas on heretics and non-Christian religions, but he fails to accept that modern thought, understood as heralding new or revising old ethical ideals, was itself directed against these irrational and sectarian prejudices. And although he would dispute it, the universal egalitarianism underpinning his thought springs in part at least from modern struggles against the explicit exclusions of heroic and classical societies and the counterfeit universalism of medieval Christianity. The result of poor genealogy is that MacIntyre's (*DRA*: 102) warning that "even the best sets of social relationship are to some important degree flawed ... [marred by] victimization and exploitation" appears to apply only to modern contexts when it has equal, if not greater, application to earlier societies.

MacIntyre therefore fails to entertain the reasonable suspicion that pre-modernity, because riven with status inequalities, may have been even less amenable to inclusive engagement in meaningful practices than modernity (Bernstein, 1986a: 125; Miller, 1994: 258). Skewed historical analysis also permits his totalizing condemnation of modern liberalism. That he refuses to be moved from thinking liberalism fallen, despite sharing many convictions with it, is all the more peculiar when one reads that liberalism arose in resistance to "outmoded forms of social organisation" and "what the modern world has realised are the *worst fears* of the Scottish Enlightenment rather than its *best hopes*."²² A fundamental error here is the classification of liberalism as a single tradition, when it, as with conservatism or socialism, sub-divides into several perspectives. American neo-liberals are said to be fundamentally at one, for instance, with the German social democratic tradition (*PP*: 244), even though their principles stand poles apart. Here MacIntyre gives way to the oversimplifying reductionism with which he (1970: 89; *ASLA*: 281) had reproached Marcuse and Robert Paul Wolff years before. In a similarly reductive fashion, he denies every liberalism the chance that it might substantively learn from other traditions and cast off its "emotivist" shackles. What was possible for Aquinas, his exemplary bridging of

²¹ Thus disputing McMyler's (1994: 39) claim that MacIntyre does not presuppose a *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* split. See Larmore (1987: 36-39) and Gutmann (1992: 135).

²² (*AV*: 60; 1991b: 271-272, my italics). One "best hope" was for the appearance of an educated public, a hope which MacIntyre (1999d: 245-261; 2002: 16) has recently accepted as the "great achievement of the Enlightenment."

Augustinian and Aristotelian traditions, is deemed impossible under contemporary circumstances.²³

The above arguments suggest MacIntyre holds to a *degenerative logic*, the flip-side of Habermas' progressive "developmental logic."²⁴ He thus stands vulnerable to Arendt's (Ch 7.I.i) observation that to read history as a movement of inexorable rise or decline is to ignore the contingency and sheer unpredictability of human affairs. The danger here is that the evils of the present or, conversely, of the past are glossed over in deference to a theoretical construct. Furthermore, MacIntyre's belief in the irredeemable fallenness of modernity sits ill with his emphasis on *fortuna*, the former contention being wholly unjustified if the latter pervades the human condition, since no one could then claim to *know* whether an age is truly beyond redemption.

We will return to this point (Ch 10.III.ii). Before doing so the acute dilemma involved in MacIntyre's disavowal of modernity must be admitted. MacIntyre commits himself to the Aristotelian assertion that "the life of virtue within the community of the *polis* is available only to those who already participate more or less fully in that life" (*WJ*: 110). That is, only through inculcation within *pre-existing* authoritative standards do the young learn what it is to be proficient reflective practitioners and thereafter take over these standards to maintain, augment, or reject them. The good is *already* but imperfectly in the world, not hidden from view in some speculative realm of Ideas (Schnädelbach, 1987: 226-233; Dunne, 1993: 380). Yet modernity is also said to exclude practices and the common goods embodied within them. Those born within the social structures of modernity, the vast majority now living within Western cultures, lack the educative and institutional pre-requisites to advance or even to identify their own and their common good. The unavoidable implication is that for actors not belonging to marginalized pre-modern communities there exists little possibility of practical learning and, by inference, of critiquing received standards. But if this is so, then MacIntyre is caught in a dilemma, for contemporary actors, the "plain persons" of whom he speaks, cannot be simultaneously capable *and* incapable of perceiving a temporally located good. He must either hold to Aristotle's claim that the good exists and admit that modernity is receptive, however inadequately, to practices and their educative structures or hold to his totalizing critique and reject Aristotle in favour of some latter-day Platonism.

²³ Aquinas' project is "incomplete," in need of revision, yet similar revision is denied liberal thought (*WJ*: 143, 171-172). See O'Neill (1983: 395-398).

²⁴ In this, however, Habermas is far less suspect than MacIntyre. As we saw, Habermas defends an unacceptable developmental logic, but he remains significant for attempting to preserve modernity, the present, as normatively meaningful, thus staving off Weber's totalizing pessimism (Ch 4.I.i).

Yet MacIntyre does in fact believe modern actors engage in practical reasoning, indirectly conceding that modernity is not irredeemably corrupt.²⁵ This concession is important. Without it his virtue ethics would be the “anachronism” Schneewind (1997: 200) and Loudon (1997: 215-216) think it to be, unable to identify the needs of modern actors or, having rejected modernity as lost, to provide guidance in contemporary problem situations. But in making this concession MacIntyre’s argument undergoes significant, albeit unacknowledged, transformation. It is no longer the case that modern society *excludes* recognition of human capabilities or needs or has *abolished* excellences. Rather, it gives *insufficient* recognition to capabilities and needs which it otherwise presumes in its daily functioning. And instead of abolishing excellences and common goods, it has *replaced* these with deficient stand-ins, even while still presupposing the continuing relevance of genuine virtues and goods. The modern world is therefore marred by internal contradictions, at odds with itself. But in this it is no more remarkable than pre-modernity.

10.II.ii.) Thomist Realism, Pluralism, and Ethical Uncertainty

MacIntyre’s pessimism stems largely from his acceptance of Weber’s diagnosis of modernity but has derived further support from his relatively late turn towards Thomist realism. This realism makes two key claims, one metaphysical, the other ethical-political. The metaphysical is that the universe is “teleologically ordered, and the only type of teleologically ordered universe in which we have good reason to believe is a theistic universe” (1992a: 152). Reality is thus informed by “certain determinate, fixed and unalterable ... ends which provide a standard by reference to which our individual purposes, desires, interests and decisions can be evaluated” (1990c: 173-174). The end-point of enquiry is a deductive hierarchization of the different branches of knowledge, theology occupying the highest position.²⁶ The ethical-political concomitant of this perspective is that “the best kind of *polis* will have an hierarchical order” reflecting the order embodied in the *kosmos* (*WJ*: 105). Extremely difficult to achieve, yet increasing knowledge is increasing awareness of the proper determinate ends of human activity, the *summum bonum* being contemplation of God (*TRV*: 37). The various goods of the many modes of human life form a unity whose overall purpose is spiritual perfection.

²⁵ Notwithstanding “the changing portraits of the plain person which decorate the history of moral philosophy ... the plain person is fundamentally a proto-Aristotelian” (1992a: 146).

²⁶ “There is an ineliminable theological dimension ... to enquiry in an Aristotelian mode. For enquiry aspires to and is intelligible only in terms of its aspiration to finality” (1990c: 184).

Modernity's rejection of teleology in favour of a radically individualist and pluralist metaphysics justifies pessimism, or so MacIntyre contends. Yet the heterogeneity and conflict definitive of liberal politics is not a sign of how things really are but the result of mistaken reasoning. Thomism moves MacIntyre to the view that there can be no objective discord between the virtues and their goods, "the natural disposition exhibited in our most basic apprehension of those precepts [of natural law]," the infallible faculty of *synderesis*, implying a fundamental harmony between the virtuous traits of courage, justice, and charity (*WJ*: 184). If one reasons correctly, possesses requisite information, and does not suffer a flawed character, all apparently dilemmatic situations reveal themselves as being amenable to a right, true, course of action (1990b: 376, 380). Though we may be perplexed, in reality the exceptionless precepts of natural reason and the virtue of *phronesis* enable us to discover how we should in fact act, proving that uncertainty is never *perplexus simpliciter* and that ethical loss, the sense of having failed to abide by one's standards, is not a ineluctable condition of moral life.

MacIntyre is assuredly right that an adequate ethical-political theory will rely on some metaphysics, for even minimal specifications of what it means to reason tacitly presume one conception of reality and the good in opposition to others.²⁷ What is important is not metaphysics but the defensibility of particular metaphysical schemes. And there are good reasons to doubt the cogency of Thomist metaphysics, at least as articulated by MacIntyre. The first concerns the tension between MacIntyre's idea of "dialectical construction," how traditions prove themselves rationally superior to or learn from rivals, and the Thomist claim that there are truths which human beings in striving for a completely perfected science can apprehend beyond all doubt. Dialectical construction, we saw (Ch 9.IV.), entails the fallibility of all claims to truth, the historicity of understanding, and the limitations of human reasoning, ethical knowledge being a *phronetic* knowledge unsystematizable as an exact science.²⁸ Thomism, on the contrary, entails the self-evidentness of first principles, the unchanging nature of the *kosmos*, and a conception of "final truth" or "a relationship of the mind to its object which would be wholly adequate in respect to the capacities of that mind."²⁹ These two claims sit ill at ease, the one suggesting that the search for truth or the good can never be concluded, the other that a cessation of enquiry is both possible and

²⁷ Although Nussbaum (1990: 217), for instance, believes theories of human flourishing need no metaphysics, it is certainly the case that in differentiating humans from animals and gods she is already committed to metaphysical assertions as to mortality, omnipotence, and time.

²⁸ Dialectic is "unfinished at any point in its development. If we do rest in a conclusion reached by dialectical argument, it is only because no experiences have led us to revise our [beliefs]" (*WJ*: 100).

desirable. Thus, although MacIntyre (*WJ*: 361) disparages the Enlightenment dream of an encyclopaedic viewpoint and thinks the “Absolute Knowledge of the Hegelian system” a “chimera,” he in fact assumes an end-point not very dissimilar from these.

Yet the core tenet of MacIntyre’s (*TRV*: 125) theory of traditions-in-conflict is that “there is and can be no finality” and insofar as he argues for the prospect of such finality his theory threatens to collapse into incoherence. Apart from incoherence, there is also reason to doubt his understanding of teleology and hierarchical ordering. Even if we could arrive at a perfected science, it might very well be discovered that the universe is not hierarchically ordered or the various goods directed towards a single *summum bonum*. MacIntyre (*WJ*: 107) is correct that many goods are valued “for the sake” of higher goods, the good of wealth valued for the sake of the leisure it affords to pursue the excellences of family or artistic life. But this does not mean these higher goods must likewise be understood as secondary to a superordinate good. Were this the case, then the lives of agnostics or atheists would be necessarily flawed, despite the exemplary lives of Engels, Eleanor Marx, and Trotsky (*AV*: 199). He is led to a hierarchical universe and *polis* because of a deep abhorrence of Weber’s understanding of the *kosmos* as a meaningless struggle between antagonistic value spheres. But this understanding is the reverse image of the Thomist vision and negatively parasitic upon its ideal of an eternal, monistic order. MacIntyre’s mistake here is therefore to leave unquestioned the assumption shared by these opposed yet mutually supportive views, that *either* there exists an unchanging hierarchy of the good *or* the universe is a mad chaos.

Questioning this assumption, it becomes clear that Thomist realism also threatens meaninglessness, for if a perfected science were achieved, then humanity as known until now would disappear, replaced by some divine but as yet incomprehensible creature.³⁰ There is thus a pressing need for an alternative to Thomism and Weberian chaos. One such possibility is a teleological metaphysics positing the existence of objectively discernible higher goods to which other goods are hierarchically subordinated, but *without* suggesting that these higher goods are or should be subordinated to an overarching good or form of life. We will consider this possibility later (Ch 11.II.). Here it is worth recognizing, however, that this alternative returns us to MacIntyre’s (*AV*: 157-163, 178-180; 1998b: 76-77, 206) earlier non-Thomist position, where the virtues and the various goods were not thought of as forming a seamless whole and where plurality was seen as an intrinsically valuable internal

²⁹ (*WJ*: 360). MacIntyre denies that Thomism presumes the self-evidentness of first principles, but his deployment of the concept of *synderesis*, an infallible conscience, suggests otherwise.

³⁰ That Thomism implies such is proven by Coleman’s (1994: 79) declaration that “we want immortality and the cessation of desires ... the end of the search to know the cause of everything absolutely and essentially,” an aspiration with which MacIntyre (*TRV*: 137-138) agrees.

dimension of any given community. Although his later work does respect the fact of pluralism in highlighting incommensurable traditions and dissenters, it tends to regard plurality as something to be *overcome*. Against this tendency, we will argue that plurality cannot and ought not to be overcome since, practical endeavour taking myriad forms, the general “common good” must accommodate a differentiation between ultimate common goods.

Differentiation in this sense is compatible with much of what MacIntyre says, but it is incompatible with his defence of “the finality of Scripture and dogmatic tradition” (*TRV*: 125). It is also incompatible with his dismissal of ethical dilemmas as corrigible errors due either to flawed character or insufficient information. What the Thomist MacIntyre neglects is that flawed character does not logically or empirically lessen the chance of there being contradictory goods or principles. Indeed, his celebrated virtues of justice as desert and just generosity are no less conflicting than those principles of entitlement and just redistribution advocated respectively by Nozick and Rawls. Nor is it the case that a retrospectively secured fuller grasp of relevant facts nullifies dilemmatic situations, for such situations are always faced prospectively when actors, because spatially and temporally limited beings, have no possibility of stepping outside of action contexts.³¹ Many dilemmas may be amenable to a single right course of action, something Weber rules out by fiat, yet there are others where genuine ways of life cannot be reconciled without remainder, where there appear two or more equally right, yet contradictory, paths.³²

Far from being illusory, then, ethical dilemmas cannot be explained away either by reference to flawed character or insufficient information, but frequently derive their reality from unfortunate circumstances beyond actors’ control. MacIntyre (*AV*: 163, 224) once accepted this, castigating Aristotle and Aquinas for ignoring the “centrality of opposition and conflict in human life” and praising Cardinal Pole and the Marquis of Montrose for seeking better as opposed to worse ways of living through the “tragic confrontation of good with good.” The strength of this earlier view, as Kerr (1995: 41) explains, was that it recognized tragedy as understood by Aristotle, disastrous events stemming from flaws in characters such as Lear, *and* by Sophocles, where events lead Antigone to ruin. In reducing the latter to the former, MacIntyre’s Thomist turn diminishes our understanding.

³¹ Here I am relying on an argument MacIntyre (*AV*: 99) uses against game theories, that these theories, in supposing there to be a “determinate, enumerable set of factors, the totality of which comprise [an action context], ... confuse a retrospective standpoint with a prospective one.”

³² The difference between this sort of conflict and Weber’s battling value spheres is that Weber (*SV*: 147-148) sees the endorsement of aesthetics, let’s say, as automatically *devaluing* religion, whereas

The full significance of our arguments here will become clear in the following. MacIntyre's concept of practice avoids dichotomizing political space and holds on to the economic as a sphere of conscious achievement, yet his nostalgia for pre-modern local communities terminates, as Barber (1988: 187) put it, with a "Manichaeian" politics no less dichotomous than Habermas or Arendt's. This Manichaeian turn not only limits MacIntyre's relevance to contemporary political realities, ensnaring him within conspicuous paradoxes, but also threatens to nullify the gains secured by his mediating course between blunt instrumentality and sheer performance. Furthermore, his later denial of fundamental conflict between goods contributes to the fanciful belief that politics as the process of negotiating conflicts as to the common good can be transcended or overcome. The essential vulnerability and fragility of political existence is accordingly glossed over in preference for a pacific but deceptive myth.

for the earlier MacIntyre (*AV*: 224) beauty and spirituality both make authentic demands which cannot, given difficult circumstances, be met together.

10.III.) Political Manichaeism and the Problem of Compromise

10.III.i.) Community, State, and Institutional Interdependence

MacIntyre imagines the nation-state a corrupt institutional form destructive of excellence. Although never in fact neutral, nation-states must assume an ostensible neutrality and refrain from espousing ethical values, for otherwise these values would be tainted by oligarchic cliques seeking sectional ends. Local communities require the security and commodities afforded by the nation-state and capitalist market, but the relation between them will continue to be one of principled hostility.

Three distinct questions need to be asked of MacIntyre here: whether his dramatic contrast between nation-state and community is tenable, whether local communities can be the main loci of political aspiration, and whether, finally, his understanding of contemporary politics escapes the difficulties marring Habermas' and Arendt's thought. On all three counts, however, the answer has to be no. MacIntyre's contrast between state and community is defensible only on the assumption that nation-states cannot be the bearers of ethical value. Here, however, he is inconsistent. The state supposedly subverts all values and yet he praises the "Americans with Disabilities Act" for removing structural obstacles to "humane goals" and celebrates those "revolutionary struggles of the past that broke down the barriers to achieving *modern* citizenship."³³ If nation-states were inherently fallen these state-secured or state-directed achievements would be inconceivable. Yet their realization shows state corruption to be a matter of contingent fact, not theoretical generalization.

The truth that states have upheld worthy ideals suggests the stark opposition between state and community derives less from state corruption and communal rectitude, since local communities have *also* been "mean-spirited and oppressive" (*PP*: 237), than MacIntyre's nostalgia for pre-modern orders. But if MacIntyre mischaracterizes the state as necessarily debased, is he perhaps right to argue for local communities as the principal focus of political endeavour, the state playing a secondary yet highly circumscribed role? That local communities are not the sole or prime arenas of political concern is attested to by the problems of civil liberty and economic redistribution, which together illustrate the impossibility of communal self-sufficiency. Despite hostility to liberal rights discourse, MacIntyre (*AV*: 255; 1999b: 144; Ferguson, 1998: 129) defends the institutionalization of liberties as an essential check on tyranny. These are what prevent the sometimes necessary

³³ (*DRA*: 133, 142, my italics). MacIntyre (2002: 19) also cites the United States Marine Corp, a thoroughly statist body, as an "admirable example" to local communities of an institution having successfully combated racial prejudice.

temporary exclusion of unreasonable actors from mutating into permanent ostracism. What MacIntyre does not recognize, though his theory implies it, is that because plain persons depend on states for the maintenance of everyday freedoms, their lives are *constructively* informed by national constitutions and legislatures. This dependency becomes all the more important when we consider the sociological base of most local communities. MacIntyre gives the impression that communities organized toward common goods are voluntary or semi-voluntary organisations, universities, workshops or clubs, whose members pursue vocations which they need not have taken up.³⁴ Once it is accepted, however, that communities are also geographic territories of living space to which people belong more so by birth than disposition, then it is misleading to consider them in a predominantly vocational sense. As with the state, local communities are most often involuntary associations in which membership is a contingent given. What protects the homosexual or the homophobe, for example, from suffering unacceptable exclusions is a system of liberties not intrinsic to many local communities but secured through struggle on communal, intercommunal, and national levels. But insofar as MacIntyre offers no alternative to this state-centred system of protection and actually relies on it, his politics is seriously inadequate.

This inadequacy is especially apparent as regards economic redistribution. Warned to guard against bureaucratic incursions, community members should nonetheless demand from the state those resources which they lack, adopting a “double attitude” of suspicion and pragmatism (*DRA*: 133). It is instrumentally “prudent to pay one’s taxes and accept obligations which one has incurred to the state and its agencies” since they possess tremendous coercive power, yet one should remember that because the state never gives “its clients value for money,” collaboration must be minimal and distrust the rule (1994a: 303; *DRA*: 132). The difficulty here, however, is that MacIntyre’s hostility to the state forces him into a position uncomfortably close to the “free-rider” figure he (*PP*: 242) associates with liberalism. Like the free rider, his local communities seek the most they can with minimal involvement in state structures. This not only problematizes their contribution to state-maintained services such as the military and police, services which MacIntyre (2002: 14) deems necessary *and* praiseworthy, but it also leaves untheorized the institutional mechanisms needed to facilitate redistribution between wealthy communities and those

³⁴ MacIntyre does not, of course, think local communities voluntary, since for him we are as much what we inherit as what we choose. But his central idea of learning a *craft* (*TRV*: 61), be it philosophy, chess, or farming, does suggest scenarios where actors voluntarily apprentice themselves to tradition-bound activities.

denied “access to the sources of both economic and political power” by free market inequalities (*PP*: 249). In the absence of such mechanisms wealthy communities are likely to regard their obligations to disadvantaged communities as a question of charity, not duty. To prevent this there would have to be intercommunal bodies with considerable coercive powers to uphold just social expectations. But this entails the maintenance of institutions analogous to present-day states (Young, 1999: 159; Murphy, 2003: 172). Thus, in that MacIntyre rejects and yet presumes the functioning of state-like institutions, there appears a basic tension at the heart of his politics, the wish for a minimal state that will, through some miracle, rectify the inequalities of existing welfare states.³⁵

This tension is one symptom of MacIntyre’s larger insensitivity to the *structural interpenetration* of local and national institutions. Structural interpenetration means the character of the nation-state determines to a real extent what can go on within its towns and villages. MacIntyre and his liberal opponents are therefore similarly wrong to exclude ethos from national and supranational bodies, it being an ethos of a highly specific sort that sustains freedoms and ensures equity. Yet liberal neutralists are less guilty here inasmuch as they at least believe states *can* be neutral, whereas MacIntyre denies this and yet demands state functionaries act *as if* they were neutral, an impossibility by his own theory. A further effect of downplaying structural interpenetration, however, is that his vision of self-sufficient communities assumes a profoundly anachronistic air, one that is pre-Rousseauian, even pre-Aristotelian. Although swiftly antiquated by the Macedonian empire, it was Aristotle’s (*Politics*: I, 1252^a1-1253^b1) understanding that the *polis* alone could be optimally self-sufficient, not its constituent villages or tribes. By interlinking discrete families, villages, and classes, all with their own perspectives, interests, and concerns, through shared laws and the *ecclesia*, Athens achieved an independence sufficient to fulfil its material needs and arrest the ambitions of rival city-states, an independence, of course, which never assumed the form of perfect *autarky*. In retreating from the city, let alone the state, to a celebration of schools, neighbourhoods, and villages as prime political institutions, MacIntyre defends not just a pre-modern, but a pre-Athenian perspective. And because even more distant from the realities of contemporary politics than Aristotle and Rousseau’s small-scale yet squarely urban ideals, his politics cannot possibly be a viable solution to modern crises.

It was Alan of Lille’s great 12th century accomplishment, MacIntyre (*AV*: 170-171) claims, to have articulated a new political philosophy “in a time when institutions [had] to be

³⁵ Here MacIntyre confronts a quandary faced by libertarians, namely, how to reconcile a coercive state with a theory inimical to its very existence. Unlike libertarians, however, he desires an egalitarian social order, thus painting himself into the curious position of “libertarian welfarism.”

created,” whereas the espousal of locality is not an inventive response to current crisis but a return to the old. Underestimating pressing contemporary problems and neglecting structural interpenetration, MacIntyre fails by his own standards of practical progress, that a superior perspective is one which is able to explain why crises occurred *and* overcome them. Compounding this is a troubling failure to fully appreciate the economic and strategic challenges facing small-scale communities. Recognising the need to secure the external goods of wealth, power, and status, MacIntyre nonetheless thinks virtuous communities “can never ... aspire to achieve the levels of economic and technological development of advanced modernity” (*PP*: 250). Communities are not thereby condemned to a politics of “Utopian ineffectiveness, he (*PP*: 252) contends, but are instead committed to placing necessary checks upon the liberal ideology of limitless growth. He is clearly right to believe this ideology dangerous if unchecked. However, in suggesting moral excellence demands a sacrifice in efficiency, MacIntyre perpetuates a venerable, yet dangerous falsity, that justice or the good is secured at the cost of material success.³⁶ The difficulty here, as his account of the interrelation between practices and institutions shows, is that without adequate material foundations justice is *already* lost. For a politics of the common good to gain a firm foothold within the modern world it must possess resources comparable to those already possessed by governments and corporations. Hence, to countenance a sacrifice of efficiency to excellence is in fact to advocate “Utopian ineffectiveness.”

States are “to a remarkable degree united in an indissoluble partnership with the national and international market” (1999b: 139), but so too are most non-state institutions, willingly or otherwise. The fishing and farming communities prized by MacIntyre as the last bastions of virtue endure in modern conditions only by entering, harnessing, and changing state structures so as to counteract the interventions of more powerful communal and corporate interests. MacIntyre (2002: 13) at times concedes this, urging “individuals and local communities [to] deal constructively ... with the state as coercive law-maker and regulator,” but for the greater part his thought is an impediment to change. Returning to Arendt’s (Ch 7.I.ii) critique of civil society theory, the risks of MacIntyre’s privileging of locality become clear. Without intercommunal deliberative fora and constitutions, the “separation” of different governmental functions and of different locations or sources of power, villages, towns and cities, cannot be achieved, thus threatening the perpetuation of unjust power monopolies. This possibility is increased when local communities, precisely

³⁶ The “world being what it contingently is” the “cultivation of truthfulness, justice and courage will often ... bar us from being rich or famous or powerful” (*AV*: 196). See also (*WJ*: 113), where he lauds the Spartans’ “aristocratic carelessness about consequences.”

because local, are inappropriate sites for the “mediation” of opinions and policies. Without undergoing processes of distillation through various grass-roots, regional, and national deliberative fora, local opinions are more likely to reflect parochial rather than common interests, promoting not engagement with rival traditions or groups but homogeneity and introversion. MacIntyre is assuredly cognizant of these dangers, fearing isolationism and calling for “formal constitutional procedures of decision-making,” yet his political commitments render him incapable of resolving them.³⁷

If locality is not significant in itself but only important insofar as it enables political deliberation, as MacIntyre (*DRA*: 142) says, then our arguments suggest that he ought to look beyond the small-scale. The fundamental problem, however, is that his thought reinforces rather than contests Weber’s understanding of modern politics, the large-scale. Conceived as the prerogative of bureaucratic and party-political elites identified in terms of their distance from plain persons or, in Weber’s vocabulary, the mass, the state appears as an institution which rules over and dominates, instead of being both responsible *to* and the possession *of* its citizens. The thought that it might be more than a conglomeration of quantitative resources, organizational technique, and coercive means, an arena of genuine political aspiration and self-transformation, is suppressed. Thus, and in answer to our third question, MacIntyre does in fact conclude by dichotomizing political reality. Earlier we (Ch 10.I.ii) defended his view that the challenges of modernity issued less from the appearance of “norm-free” realms than the distortion of “objective activities” occasioned by perverse ethical understandings. From the above quandaries, however, it is evidently true that although his theory of practice eschews ontological spatialization, nostalgia and pessimism force him into a position structurally analogous to Habermas and Arendt’s. Practitioners’ productive powers no longer fall under the sign of functional rationality or necessity, but those citizen competencies or worker capacities connected to the state or capitalist market unfortunately do, meaning that large areas of human endeavour are automatically distanced from critique and transformation.

The paradox is that while MacIntyre goes beyond Habermas and Arendt in believing the whole of human life the proper subject of ethical deliberation and rejecting all claims to administrative neutrality, his partisanship for communal politics relinquishes these gains. The dubious supposition that modern organization and government are irrecoverably instrumental, machine-like, is consequently intensified. This need not have been the case. We (Ch 10.I.ii) commended MacIntyrean “purposeful performance” for providing an

³⁷ (*PP*: 248). For MacIntyre’s admission that many civil-social organizations pursue sectional goods

alternative to crude instrumentalism and sheer performance, one shunning the instrumental-versus-communicative, *praxis-versus-poiesis*, framework underpinning Habermas and Arendt's lifeworld-system, social-political, diremptions. This alternative incorporates *techne* within a broadly conceived *praxis* and defends a modest expertise in contrast to the impossible technocratic "expertise" fantasized about in managerial textbooks (SS: 64; AV: 106). Yet MacIntyre neglects to ask whether his alternative has application to state agencies and functionaries, whether their expertise, insofar as it is real, is also only of a modest *phronetic* kind. Slipping back into the familiar opposition of manipulative and non-manipulative realms, he conceals the possibility that insofar as state functionaries cannot claim to possess an expertise different in kind from ordinary practical wisdom, their authority stands vulnerable to critique and revision from experienced plain persons. But if this is so, then the state and its various institutions must be amenable to conscious change.

Refusing to pursue this thought, MacIntyre's project tends toward serious inconsistency. His Manichaeic opposition between community and state demands of plain persons a "double attitude" of trust and respect, suspicion and pragmatism. In their communal dealings these persons respect Kant's injunction to treat others as ends-in-themselves, but when dealing with state functionaries they are the canniest of tacticians. What is remarkable here is that this "double attitude" presumes a "compartmentalization" of institutional structures and mentalities no less uncompromising than Weber's differentiation of value-spheres. The very thing for which MacIntyre condemns liberalism is a notable feature of his own theory.

10.III.ii.) Consensus, Compromise, and Struggle

We will further consider the temptation to partition political space and its consequences in Chapter Eleven. Here we should recognize, however, that the predicaments of MacIntyre's communal politics suggest his protest has become not unlike the Marcusian sort he rebuked thirty years before. Then he criticized Marcuse for glorifying sub-cultural elites as the torchbearers of a utopian future. At that time he (1970: 92) believed "the majority of men in advanced industrial societies are often confused ... [yet] they are often *also* hopeful, critical, and able to grasp immediate possibilities of happiness and freedom." Ironically, MacIntyre's subsequent concentration on the local gives rise to a new Puritan myth of reprobate and elect, though one different from Weber's antinomy between the active few and the passive

at the cost of common goods, see his Pearson (1994: 36) interview.

mass. In place of Marcusean cultural and artistic elites, hope is now borne by minorities, be they farmers, fishing crews, or mining communities, who have by lucky happenstance avoided the fate of the majority now subject to the state and capitalist market.

It is therefore unsurprising that he should be accused of urging a “politics of withdrawal.”³⁸ This criticism is for the most part apposite. MacIntyre’s (*AV*: 255) totalizing insistence that “modern systematic politics, whether liberal, conservative, radical, or socialist, simply has to be rejected” exalts the peripheral to such an extent that the possibility of subjecting mainstream institutions to ethical demands is precluded. The danger here, of course, is that this retreat to the margins of contemporary societies lends unwelcome credence to Weber’s (*PW*: 298; *SV*: 149) denunciation of emancipatory aspiration as a “romanticism” incapable of measuring up “to *workaday* existence.”

Yet MacIntyre thinks withdrawal appropriate given the dominant political mentality. This mentality is marked by “adaptability” to “shifting coalitions of interest and power,” where “compromise” and “bargaining” are the response to interminable conflict (*PP*: 245; 1999c: 326). Because there are no agreed principles to coherently organize clashing forms of life, flexibility and sophistic rhetoric have become indispensable to modern politicians. All this contrasts strongly with political orders where the various goods pursued are consensually “integrated into the life of an overall community ... able to ... celebrate that life by the things it does together, in a ceremonial and festive way.”³⁹ Here coherence, reason, and integrity are applauded as virtues, not vices.

MacIntyre’s opposition between state and community is therefore guided by a more fundamental opposition between a strategic politics of factional conflict and a consensual politics of the common good. Once we question the former we are forced to question the latter, however. We have already discussed some convincing reasons why. Extrapolating from the problems of nostalgia, poor genealogy, and those discussed in the previous section, our first argument against this opposition concerns the impossibility of escaping interminable conflict, the *sine qua non* of MacIntyre’s consensual politics. The image of a community celebrating its life in a “ceremonial and festive way” indicates MacIntyre’s predominant, though not exclusive, concern with political deliberation as conducted *within* specific communities. This is not an unfair reading given his proposals regarding post-liberal universities. Because modern society is torn between conflicting practical rationalities and ideals, each university should organize itself according to the principles of its dominant

³⁸ See, for instance, Barber (1982: 27-32), Barry (1989: 160-168), Pettit (1994: 183), Holmes (1996: 106), and Etzioni (1999: 165).

³⁹ MacIntyre in Pearson (1994: 36). See, as well, Porter (1993: 526-527) and Ferguson (1998: 127).

“tradition,” be it Thomist along the lines of 13th century Paris or Genealogical as suggested by Vincennes during 1968. “Wider society” would thus confront the claims of rival universities, each advancing “in its own terms and each securing the type of agreement necessary to ensure progress” (*TRV*: 234). The problem with this proposal is not that it is patently wrong, but that analysis remains at the level of parts rather than wholes, MacIntyre’s focus being individual traditions, particular communities, not “wider society” itself.⁴⁰ Yet the reality of structural interpenetration shows the most pressing questions concern politics understood as a *community of communities* or a *network of networks*. Once this is accepted, as MacIntyre (*DRA*: 122) sometimes does, then the chance of transcending interminable conflict even within individual communities or universities, when these are inescapably intertwined with others, becomes extremely unlikely at best, at worst fantasy.

Interminable conflict is basic to human existence *per se*, unlimited to specific arenas or times. We are thus brought to our second argument, that MacIntyre’s ideal community and solution to factional conflict leads to a highly implausible and tension-ridden conclusion. MacIntyre’s realism is guided not only by a *degenerative logic*, looking towards the past for inspiration, but also by a belief in an *end-point* to endeavour, the quasi-divine achievement of complete comprehension (Ch 10.II.ii). He is compelled to this, we saw, by his assumption that the goal of ethical enquiry is a deductive hierarchization of various goods under a contemplative *summum bonum*. This end-point jars with his idea of dialectical construction and tends towards a meaningless no less troubling than Weberian chaos, but it also has severe consequences for the status of politics. Drawing once more from Arendt’s (Ch 7.I.ii) theory of citizenship, it becomes clear that the friendship MacIntyre envisages between plain persons in his ideal community threatens to disturb the balance between distance and commonality necessary for a robust institutional *praxis*. In contrast to Habermas, whose “generalized other” errs on the side of distance and undermines the motivational impetus to joint action, MacIntyre’s ideal “integrated community” errs on the side of commonality. Practitioners being basically one in their acceptance of identical *arche*, their community is distinguished from wider society because of a strong consensus on the good. But if they have *already* come to a strong consensus or awareness of first principles, then their reasons for engaging with others politically, fundamental disagreements as to ethical presuppositions and purposes, cease to apply. Their ideal community appears to resolve the quandaries of contemporary politics only because politics itself no longer exists.

⁴⁰ See Gutting’s (1999: 100) related worry that MacIntyre’s stress on locality, not just “classical Latin” but “Latin-as-written-and-spoken-in-the-Rome-of-Cicero” (*WJ*: 373), problematizes the transmission of traditions over centuries and through different forms of life.

Were MacIntyre's ideal possible and desirable, then he could not endorse Aristotle's definition of man as *zoon politikon*, since a quality capable of being transcended cannot constitute part of a being's essential nature. MacIntyre's Aristotelianism stands therefore at odds with itself, thinking politics an integral part of human life and yet positing its disappearance.⁴¹ This does not yet invalidate his opposition between consensual and strategic politics, but it does suggest his programme for avoiding the conflict generative of the latter cannot be pursued without considerable internal tension. Reflection on that tension, however, brings us to our third argument, the inevitability of compromise *even* within a politics directed towards the common good. The earlier MacIntyre (*AV*: 164) concurred with John Anderson's "insight" that it is "sometimes only through conflict that we learn what our ends and purposes are." From this more Sophoclean perspective the best achievable is a community marked by a creative dynamic of unity and disunity, acceptance and critique, where difficulties are creatively engaged and overcome, a view which endures in his theory of traditions-in-conflict. This creative dynamic excludes as wholly implausible the thought that difficulty as a recurrent feature of human life could *itself* be overcome and contradicts the Thomist belief in the unity of the virtues and the good.

But even the earlier MacIntyre, who sees in the "tragic confrontation of good with good" a revelatory test of character, fails to register the implications of rejecting Aquinas' unity thesis. For when we accept that goods conflict, that communities, not simply states, are characterized by fundamental conflict, and that actors sometimes face dilemmas having no clear resolution, then adaptability and compromise assume an ethical, rather than merely instrumental, status. In both MacIntyre's earlier and later periods compromise is tainted by association with emotivist preference maximization. Omitted throughout is the possibility that compromise and adaptation might be more than accommodation to shifting interests, but instead appropriate responses to situations where the achievement of two equally worthy goods is impossible or, more seriously, where the overriding importance of a specific goal necessitates partial yet grave infractions of the "natural law" (Johnson, 1994: 62). And this for a reason MacIntyre himself concedes, that the "protagonist cannot do everything that he or she ought to do."⁴²

⁴¹ This is also a criticism of Aristotle. Like MacIntyre (*AV*: 158; *WJ*: 108, 143), Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*: 1094^a10-1094^b12, 1177^a10-1179^a30) alternates between the view that politics constitutes an integral element of *eudaimonia* and the subordinating thesis that political goods are inferior to contemplation.

⁴² (*AV*: 224). The inevitability of ethical loss is also suggested by his (*PP*: 252, my italics) injunction that practitioners should secure state resources "at a *price acceptable* by [their] local community."

Because actors inhabit a contingent world interwoven with complex interpersonal and historical narratives, their avoidance of the problems of clashing goods and dirty hands is often a matter of brute luck. The political vices MacIntyre attributes to liberalism and the state are therefore not always vices, but unavoidable imperfections, as when, for example, perpetrators of atrocities are freed so as to ensure future peace. For MacIntyre to deny this conclusion and uphold his identification of compromise with emotivism, he would also have to deny *fortuna*. But this he cannot do, since his arguments against bureaucratic technocracy hinge on the inevitable role of unpredictability in human life. It is in the nature of human beings, he (*AV*: 103) declares, to desire predictability so their projects can gain secure tenure, yet this tenure is “permanently vulnerable and fragile.” The fact that technocratic claims to authority presuppose an entirely predictable world devoid of vulnerability indicates their absurd unreality. But just as managerial predictions are often confounded “by an unpredicted and unpredictable counter-example,” so too are good intentions constrained to adapt to unforeseen events (*AV*: 93).

Fortuna, then, obliges MacIntyre to accept compromise and adaptability as unavoidable and sometimes laudable. Nevertheless, he could admit their role and yet argue this admission does not jeopardise his identification of consensual deliberation with the politics of the common good. His politics allows for moments of imperfection, but it still rejects the strategic attitude prevalent in liberal cultures. This defence is unsuccessful for two important reasons, however. The first, we saw, is that although MacIntyre denigrates the strategic attitude, his stark dichotomization of state and community presumes the endurance of an instrumental politics. Among themselves community members cherish cooperative deliberation, but their relation to state functionaries is one of *principled*, not frequent or occasional, hostility. Practitioners’ will to consensus coexists and defines itself against their equally strong commitment to manipulation when dealing with non-communal institutions. Considering his politics as a whole, then, it is clear that far from countering the dominant tendency to view politics strategically, MacIntyre explicitly perpetuates it, albeit in a limited arena.

Of course, MacIntyre believes he is forced to perpetuate a Weberian understanding of community-state relations on account of the Weberian realities underlying the state and capitalist market. The instrumental nature of state politics compels plain persons to use manipulative means to defend their communal ends, even if these same persons must also at times collaborate in an “*ad hoc*” way with the state to battle the evils of imperialism or fascism. A limited endorsement of strategy does not, he would assert, invalidate the opposition between consensual and strategic politics but represents a justifiable response to a

contingent state of affairs which does not apply to the internal functioning of Aristotelian communities.

But this brings us to our final argument, that by his own theory MacIntyre cannot excise strategy from the internal functioning of local communities. Basic to his theory is the idea of educated publics vigorous enough to sustain deliberation as to the common good. These publics are defined in contrast to the factionalism and manipulative mass media of existing liberal publics. They are defined, as well, by the rationality or justness of their exclusions. Unlike liberal publics, which because dominated by oligarchic elites exclude the poor and vulnerable, MacIntyre's educated publics exclude those who break with the principles of conversational justice or continue to uphold patently false or immoral views. Towards the phrenologist and the racist, plain persons are justified in showing intolerance (1999b: 147-148).

The problem here is not MacIntyre's insistence upon conversational constraints or his presumption that there must be considerable agreement as to common goods, if never the strong consensus presumed by his ideal. Once phrenology and racism are rejected as defunct or unjust, for there to be any future progress in debate and for it to be fair phrenologists and racists do have to be excluded. The difficulty, instead, is his insensitivity to what is involved in excluding others from debate. The very fact that the phrenologist and racist have not been convinced to revise their opinions means debate has ended in argumentative stalemate.⁴³ Thus, the only option open is to temporarily ignore or eject these incorrigible characters. But, and decisively, the phrenologist and racist will contest this turn, will refuse to be silent or leave the chamber. Because they believe they are acting in the common good, they will instead coalesce into factions and attempt, through agitation or appeal to freedom of speech, to counter their exclusion. To defeat them, practitioners cannot use argument, since argument has already failed, but will have to form factions of their own and resort to electoral campaigning, majoritarian voting procedures or, in moments of extreme crisis, coercion. But this resort entails a resurgence of the strategic politics MacIntyre would like to confine to the state. Here the attempt to divorce a deliberative politics from strategy reaches intractable limits.

Because exclusions are often necessary and yet by their very nature non-consensual, the strategic cannot and, as the racism shows, ought not to be eliminated. The turn to strategy is not always egoistic, but frequently arises from the painful realization that given stubborn differences the well-being of one's society demands a willingness to impose authoritative

settlements. In line with his Thomist commitment to the infallible faculty of *synderesis* and fundamental coherence of our basic values, MacIntyre would attribute such moments to a failing on the part of racists to see the incoherence of their opinions and uphold a philosophically defensible position. The difficulty here, however, is that while every political perspective relies on some philosophy, politics is *not* philosophy. There are, as we saw in our critique of Habermas and Arendt (Ch 4.III.ii, 7.III.ii), temporally urgent moments when actors are unsure as to the coherence of their views and have not achieved consensus but nonetheless must act. Blind to these moments, MacIntyre's politics is motivated by a belief in "perfect legitimacy" where actors' determination of the common good, as in Habermas' "ideal-speech situation" or Arendt's moment of foundation, can occur without remainder, without enduring dissent and hostility. Coupled with his belief in an end-point to political struggle, this "perfect legitimacy" masks the vulnerability of political existence, the challenges faced by citizens, and the uncertain paths they sometimes have to take to ensure justice. The politics of local community transcends the cut and thrust of liberal politics at the cost of generating a myth of ideal coherence.

⁴³ As to argumentative stalemate, MacIntyre (*AV*: 277) admits "there are no successful *a priori* arguments which will guarantee in advance that such a situation could not occur."

Conclusion

Our study of MacIntyre has reached its conclusion. We have shown what is valuable in his work, in particular his emphasis on flourishing and defence of a conception of ethics which avoids Weberian decisionism. This emphasis is complemented by a non-dichotomous theorization of political practice that recovers “system” and “the social” as ethical concerns and provides an important alternative to the binary of crude instrumentalism and sheer performance. Here MacIntyre represents a distinct advance upon Habermas and Arendt’s critique of Weber.

Yet we have also shown his errors, some unique to his thought. MacIntyre’s contrast between consensual pre-modernity and conflictual modernity contradicts the undeniable modernism of his theory of traditions-in-conflict and undercuts his account of ethical learning. His Thomist realism, in turn, excludes the possibility of a non-subjective pluralism, is inconsistent with the idea of dialectical construction, and has as its guiding ideal the surmounting or transcendence of politics. But these specific failings also exacerbate false turns shared with Habermas and Arendt. MacIntyre’s non-dichotomous theorization of practice gives way to a dichotomous division of state and local community in many ways reminiscent of Habermas and Arendt’s bifurcations. With these two, as well, he yearns for a moment of perfect legitimacy, an impossible end to strategy.

We are now finally in a position to interlink our various arguments with and against these three thinkers to come to a broader view as to the possibilities and challenges of politics in a post-Weberian era. The guiding assumption of our study has been that while these three are in very important ways quite different, their thought is nonetheless marked by a strong continuity in their response to Weber’s diagnosis of modernity. Some continuities are highly laudable, in particular their emphasis on intersubjectivity. Others, their bifurcations and over eagerness to relegate the strategic to a fallen or anti-political status, are seriously mistaken. The same, too, with their discontinuities. Although some hamper our understanding, we saw there are others which, if conjoined in an appropriate way, show a way beyond the Weberian antinomy of leader and machine, even if aspects of Weber’s thought cannot sensibly be left behind.

Chapter 11

Conclusion: Political Thought and Practice in a Post-Weberian Era

11.I.) A Brief Summary

Our study began by posing the problem of politics in terms of Max Weber's diagnosis of modernity. For Weber modernity is paradoxical in that the processes of enlightenment and rationalization promise individual maturity and yet threaten servitude (Ch 1.I.). The "iron cage" of formal bureaucratic organization and senseless hedonism is the fate of man under capitalism. Weber's stoical response was to affirm the paradox of modernity, to concede that all practical endeavour would now take the form of a specialism, but that this endeavour could transcend hedonism and be rendered minimally meaningful by a fundamental act of choice between the antagonistic realms of art, science, religion, and politics. This radical decisionism informs his analysis of and prescriptions regarding politics, three features of which are decisive (Ch 1.II.). First, political life is a struggle over the means of violence and domination utterly inimical to all "ethics of brotherliness." To enter politics is to contract with diabolical powers, to place one's soul in jeopardy. Second, modern politics cannot but be machine-like, dependent on a vast bureaucratic apparatus, but bureaucratic organization can be held in check by exceptional charismatic leaders imbued with a vocation for politics differentiating them from the passive mass. A monist antinomy of politicians and bureaucrats, entrepreneurs and corporations, is the sole basis for a minimal endurance of individual freedom in modernity. Third, political life cannot be assessed or justified by reference to specific values, since politics as a means admits of a radical plurality of conflicting ideals. Rather, the sole criterion for legitimacy is *de facto* belief in legitimacy regardless of justifiability. Weber's solution to the gaping lacuna between mere belief in authority and justified belief in authority is the figure of the responsible politician, the *Verantwortungsethiker*. This solution, however, is entirely subjective, premised on an inscrutable decision to act responsibly and not otherwise.

With Weber as both problem and foil, our study proposed a threefold argument. We maintained, first, that Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, and Alasdair MacIntyre all begin with and largely accept Weber's diagnosis of modernity. Thus Habermas' analysis of "one-sided rationalization" and "colonization," Arendt's narrative of the rise of the "Social" and the processes of "world-alienation" or "subjectification," and MacIntyre's account of "emotivist culture" and "bureaucratic individualism" are all inspired by the "iron cage," despite different nuances and emphases (Ch 1.III., 3.I., 3.III., 6.I., 6.II., 9.I., 9.II.). Second,

we claimed that they nonetheless reject his understanding of the grounds and possibilities of politics, thinking him complicit in the very realities he sought to resist. Thus, Habermas argues that Weber's adherence to the philosophy of consciousness paradigm blinded him to the distinction between subjective ethical commitment and discursively validated moral norms and conflated lifeworld rationalization with systemic rationalization, thereby ending in decisionism and pessimism. Weber's Platonic substitution of work for action and identification of freedom with an inner sovereignty or will abetted, in Arendt's view, the equation of politics with violence and the processes of world alienation which would culminate in totalitarianism. For MacIntyre, lastly, Weber's antinomy between the charismatic leader and machine represents a radicalization of liberal individualism and therefore augments rather than holds in check the compartmentalization, emphasis on preference satisfaction, and endemic tendency to manipulation which currently prevent the realization of a rational politics.

The third component of our argument was that these three thinkers simultaneously aid and hinder in thinking beyond the "iron cage." Bound by a shared commitment to intersubjectivity as both reality and ideal, and yet understanding this intersubjectivity differently, each illuminates important but partial rejoinders to Weber's ordeal of personality. For various reasons, however, their theories cannot be endorsed in full. Some failings are unique, yet the more fundamental are shared, suggesting the difficulties encountered are not confined to these thinkers but possess general significance.

The goal of the following is to further explicate this third component by recounting our key claims, disputing challenges to these, and pointing to areas of especial concern. Thus we begin by returning to the question of ethics and politics, that is, the manner in which they interrelate and the principal ideals implied in their interrelation (Ch 11.II.). Habermas and Arendt's contributions to this question are reiterated, as are our reasons for defending MacIntyre's ideal of flourishing as a necessary correction to these contributions. Two fundamental criticisms are also addressed. The first is that our understanding of the goal of politics as flourishing illegitimately *subordinates* citizens' democratic prerogatives to a philosophical vision. Moral-ethical questions, in other words, should only be answered by actors themselves, not by theorists. The second concerns the suspicion that a politics emphasizing flourishing relies on a *cryptofascist* metaphysic corrosive of the plurality of modern life. In reply, we argue that the first criticism relies on a basic conceptual confusion and that the second ignores the compatibility of a politics of flourishing with political independence and the fact of value pluralism.

Thereafter a key theme of our study is further considered, the question of the site of political endeavour and the pernicious tendency to bifurcate political space (Ch 11.III.). Here it is argued against the dualisms perpetuated by Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre that only a monist understanding of political space is defensible, but that Weber's version of monism has to be rejected, since it falsely condemns large-scale organization to a depersonalizing and hierarchical instrumentalism. It is precisely this conception of large-scale organization which led Habermas and Arendt to depoliticize political administration and the economy and Habermas and MacIntyre to privilege civil society. With these false trajectories in mind, we argue that the state and the economy are the prime sites of political endeavour and that the contemporary turn to civil society is both theoretically mistaken and politically timid, a symptom of rather than a response to the status quo.

The following section returns to the role of strategy and coercion in political life (Ch 11.IV.). Building on our observations from "argumentative stalemate," "temporal urgency," and the inescapability of "remainder," the main argument is that communication, *praxis*, and political reasoning are inevitably interwoven with strategy and contestation. There is no one basic or fundamental "logic" which demarcates the political *qua* political. Although opposed, Weber and our three thinkers are similarly guilty of fundamentalism, of seeking to reduce politics to a single, predominant logic. This truth has significant implications for the practice of politics. Bringing our study to a close, we argue that the strategic attitude finds support on normative grounds and that the legitimacy of political orders is at best a "rough" legitimacy.

11.II.) Flourishing and Pluralism

A central contention of this study is that Habermas, Arendt and MacIntyre together show a path beyond Weber's value-scepticism, thus obviating subjectivist and political-realist dismissals of politics as a shared ethical activity. Regarding Habermas, his arguments against Weber's formalist reduction of legitimacy and neglect of the intersubjective ground of accountability recast politics as an endeavour intimately bound to normative expectations (Ch 4.I.ii). This is complemented by his account of "lifeworld sociation" and "socialization," which reconfigures Weber's "loss of freedom" and "loss of meaning" theses in intersubjective terms and provides a non-subjective referent, socio-pathology, for critique (Ch 4.I.i). Far more attuned to the plurality, contingency, and vulnerability of political freedom, the truth that such freedom need not exist, Arendt shows the narrow philosophical focus of Habermas and MacIntyre's theories in drawing attention to the moderation and care required for a vibrant political culture (Ch 7.I.i, 10.II.i). In this her emphasis on promising is especially important in suggesting that it is actual agreements between real actors which are decisive in politics.

Significant false turns mar Habermas and Arendt's theories, however. We argued that Habermas' proceduralism is untenable given his commitment to a substantive personality ideal and that the solidly ethical grounds of this ideal are obscured by his diremption of morality and ethics (Ch 4.II.i). Indeed, his equation of ethics with the subjective and conventional threatens to reinforce Weber's value-scepticism. These failings are exacerbated by an abstract and reductive understanding of critique, which disregards the historical specificity of moral-ethical reasoning and neglects the role of experience (Ch 4.II.ii). In like fashion, Arendt's theory of reflective judgement aspires to a "spectatorial disinterestedness" running counter to her emphasis on the "web of relationships" and worldly tangibility (Ch 7.II.ii). Not only are the experiential criteria needed for distinguishing good from bad judgement left unthematized, but in contending that spectators possess an unconditioned autonomy her theory of judgement surreptitiously compounds the "world alienation" or "subjectification" with which she accuses Weber. Struggling against subjectivism, Habermas and Arendt nonetheless remain bound to it.

MacIntyre's thought is also problematic. An inordinate hostility to modernity undercuts his account of practical learning and commitment to a universal egalitarianism explicitly denied in heroic, classical and medieval societies (Ch 10.II.i). Deference to Thomist moral realism, on the other hand, conflicts with the idea of "dialectical construction," prompts an

ill-founded rejection of ethical dilemmas, and leads to the multiplicity of higher goods being subordinated to a questionable *summum bonum* (Ch 10.II.ii). Habermas' awareness of the moral-ethical dimensions of the transition to modernity and Arendt's stress on plurality are important correctives here. In decisive ways, however, MacIntyre's is a superior response to Weber. In direct contradiction to Habermasian proceduralism, he understands practical reason as a teleological enquiry into the ends of human activity, an enquiry which renders "socialization" concrete by reference to the practices men engage in. Ethics is properly understood as the foundation of morality, but this foundation is neither subjective nor conventional but premised on a dialectically secured comprehension of genuinely common goods and needs that stand amenable to rational dispute across traditions (Ch 10.I.i). Hence the universal-ethical standard of self-transformative activity, *flourishing*, which MacIntyre defines as the reflective extension and augmentation of innate human powers. Yet unlike Habermas or Arendt, he does not defer to an abstractly conceived system of rules or a privileged "final arbiter" to ground critique (Ch 10.I.ii). Instead, critique takes a multiplicity of forms dependent on the activity in question and the *phronetic* experience of participants. Although the end, the achievement of independence or maturity, remains constant, the paths necessarily differ.

The ideal of independence points to flourishing as a prime political goal. MacIntyre best thematizes that goal, yet in an elementary sense neither Weber, Habermas, nor Arendt repudiates it. Each is concerned with the "quality" of human life, each is assured that quality means more than mere functioning, and each, finally, is certain that political engagement constitutes a key element of mature personhood. Weber's responsible politician, Habermas' postconventional subject, and Arendt's public spirited citizen together reject the classical liberal reduction of politics to security or the satisfaction of private preference.¹ Indeed, this reduction is itself deceptive in that all societies, whether liberal or illiberal, must give recognition to human capabilities, common goods, and excellences, even if this recognition be tacit, skewed, and patently insufficient.² A polity failing to place teleological enquiry at the heart of its deliberations cannot endure.

Although our analysis has been predominately metatheoretical, asking how best to theorize ethics rather than offering specific suggestions as to the relation between politics and education, for instance, or a full exploration of the conditions of the good life, it should

¹ Here we should recall Weber's repudiation of hedonism, Habermas' critique of neo-liberalism, and Arendt's warnings regarding the "job-holding" society (Ch 1.II., 4.II.i, 6.I.).

² See (Ch 10.II.i) above, where we claimed MacIntyre's totalizing dismissal of modernity ignores that modern societies do not *exclude* consideration of capabilities, needs, or excellences but instead *mischaracterize* them. See, in confirmation, Nussbaum's (1990: 210-213) critique of Rawls.

by now be clear that the political vision defended here is thoroughly perfectionist. A robust politics *nurtures* the conditions of individual flourishing, *facilitates* those practices in which flourishing is realized, and *encourages* the augmentation of shared ideals through intersubjective reflection (Ch 9.IV.). A next step would be to theorize the substantive implications of nurturance, facilitation, and encouragement in the arenas of education, work, and citizenship. Such is obviously beyond the scope of this study, but here we can at least counter two serious objections to its status as a permissible philosophical project.

The first is that a philosophical project directed towards ascertaining the conditions, structures, or proper modes of the fulfilled life illegitimately usurps the citizen's right to determine the shape and direction of his polity. This criticism issues from a number of quarters. Deontological proceduralists such as Habermas argue that decisions as to substantive principles and ethical goals ought to be left up to actors themselves, since these principles and goals can only be deemed legitimate after having undergone the test of plural discursive argumentation. Consequently, neo-Aristotelians, perfectionist liberals, and even Rawlsians are accused of being Philosopher Kings, of failing to accept that all philosophy can do is delineate the formal-pragmatic presuppositions of argumentation.³ In a similar vein, but firmly rejecting philosophy's pre-eminence over procedural questions, communitarians such as Walzer contend that our project threatens a "disconnected" sort of critique whereby distinct cultures are judged according to alien and therefore distorting standards.⁴ The only defensible critique is an "immanent" sort dependent upon and explicating values actually shared by citizens of particular societies. From both sides, a general philosophical analysis of the good life is deemed license for manipulation and domination, for foisting upon ordinary subjects a vision which they have not agreed to or, differently, which impairs the integrity of their culture.

These criticisms are mistaken. As regards the proceduralists, we have already shown that procedures cannot be separated from substantive content and that much of this content is ethical (Ch 4.II.i). Because the argumentative presuppositions of discourse ethics presume a developmental theory of moral consciousness in turn dependent on a broad conception of good human functioning strenuously contested by some mainstream ideologies, neo-liberalism in particular, Habermas' demand that philosophy limit itself to bare procedures appears decidedly incoherent. As regards the communitarian critique, on the other hand, it has to be admitted that in refusing to separate justification and application we conceded there

³ Behind these projects "lurks the philosopher king who wants to put the world in order, not the citizen of a democratic state" (*JA*: 86). See also (*CES*: 90, 199; *MCCA*: 66-67; *JA*: 176).

⁴ Walzer (1983: XV; 1987: 6, 64). My discussion of Walzer relies on Plant (1991: 327-330, 361-375).

is no knowledge of values or goods independent from the experience of these within determinate contexts (Ch 4.II.ii, 10.I.). But this does not limit theory to immanent critique. The mistake of Walzer and other communitarians is to treat societies as self-referential monads whose evaluations are internally directed, when in fact most are the result of an interface between cultures and make evaluative claims of strong universal, as opposed to conventional, reference.⁵ Thus, although critique is inevitably context bound, it can partially transcend contexts by attending to *intercultural* as well as *intracultural* conflict. By a process of dialectical conversation and comparison, where claims to universality and superiority are tested intellectually in terms of coherence and cogency and practically in terms of their problem-solving capacity, it is possible to come to *better* rather than worse evaluative standpoints. Philosophical reflection simultaneously mirrors and critiques received values in the hope of arriving at genuinely universal conceptions of the just and good.⁶

The fundamental difficulty with these proceduralist and communitarian objections is not their incoherence or foreclosure on intercultural criticism, however, but rather a residual Platonism. Accusing perfectionist theories of hubristic ambition, it is nonetheless these objections which remain paradoxically tied to the Philosopher King. Habermas and Walzer wish to uphold a sphere of competence in which citizens have authority, yet like Plato they express their ban on general teleological reflection in their role as *philosophers*, thus accruing to themselves an especial authority to delineate the ways in which others may think. This is exacerbated by their equally Platonic confusion of philosophy with governance. For Plato, the thinker theorizes an ideal of the good or just and then compels reality to conform to this ideal. The problem here, of course, is that Plato, as well as Habermas and Walzer, elides the distinction between reflection and rule. Philosophy may defend particular conceptions of the good, particular social arrangements, as best, but this defence does not logically translate into the demand that these conceptions or arrangements be collectively enforced against the will of citizens. It only so translates if one assumes that thinking about the right course of action *also* means being permitted to pre-emptively determine the course of action, a dubious inferential leap. A far more plausible understanding of the relation between philosophy and rule is that philosophical theories and their practical conclusions

⁵ "The protagonists of those standpoints which generate large and systematic disagreements, like the members of the moral communities of human kind in general, are never themselves relativists" (MacIntyre, 1994c: 204; 1987b: 134).

⁶ As Plant (1991: 362) makes clear, Walzer (1983: 314) himself forwards many universalist claims, not least the injunction that it is "unjust" to disregard the "distinct understandings ... that contribute to a shared way of life."

become opinions once expressed in public, opinions which it would be senseless to believe automatically trump the opinions of ordinary citizens, who, for their part, also philosophize, also render experience reflective. There is therefore an extreme hyperbolism at work in Habermas and Walzer's arguments, the absurd supposition that Dionysius of Syracuse, Alexander, and Nero really were in danger of becoming the puppet playthings of Plato, Aristotle, or Seneca.

The philosopher, then, is neither a ruler in waiting nor a mere interpreter of cultures, but a reflective critic voicing doubts and aspirations which frequently go beyond the bounds of his own society. In this he differs from other social critics in degree, not kind.⁷ A related but far more significant criticism of our project, however, concerns less a fear of philosophical hubris than the suspicion that the ideal of flourishing itself threatens diversity and plurality. The metaphor of health or well-being, the argument goes, contributes to a cryptofascist politics where one way of life is imposed to the detriment of others, which are deemed degenerate or harmful.⁸ Although the expression of philosophical visions may not be identifiable with a will to manipulate, the substantive ideal we advocate would nonetheless conclude, were citizens to freely endorse it, in tyranny and homogeneity.

This criticism would be devastating if true, for implicit in our attempt to transcend Weber is a wish to prevent the move from charismatic *Reichspräsidenten* to autocratic *Führerdemokratie*, a move Weber's pupil, Carl Schmitt, actually carried out (McCormick, 1997: 40-41). However, it is not true and for reasons already intimated. As to the charge of tyranny, we argued that deontology and teleology need *not* conflict, that the teleological determination of the conditions of flourishing implies a deontological commitment to their protection (Ch 4.II.i). The very fact that a capacity or potentiality is deemed of *worth* warrants an attitude of jealous care. And because political engagement is a constitutive mark of maturity, this engagement must be protected through the enshrinement of constitutional liberties and powers (Ch 7.I.ii, 10.III.i). Rejecting a key supposition of Weberian elitism, the supposed passivity of the many, and committed to political independence and participation, our project stands in starkest contrast to a politics autocratically enforcing one mode of life.

What matters is not the affirmation or transmission of values, but *what* values are affirmed and *how* they are inculcated. Whether an ideal of flourishing is tyrannous depends

⁷ For a similar view, see Waldron (1993: 30-35). This does not warrant Rorty's (1989) reduction of philosophy to literary criticism, for philosophy remains a rigorous exploration of the true, the right, and the good. Decisively, however, one need not be a professional philosopher to perform this, nor, when one has arrived at a conclusion, is the political enforcement of conclusions entailed.

on its content, the specific values upheld. Yet if flourishing cannot be discounted as cryptofascist, neither can it be construed as homogenizing or anti-pluralist. Earlier we compared Weber's radically agonistic metaphysics with MacIntyre's Thomism (Ch 10.II.ii). There it was maintained that these opposed perspectives are premised on the assumption that the universe is either a mad chaos or forms an unchanging hierarchy guided by a single *summum bonum*. Both threaten meaninglessness, Weber denying that plural goods can be rationally interrelated and MacIntyre yearning for a moment of ideal unity where the pursuit of knowledge and the urge to act would cease. The modest moral-realist metaphysic underpinning our account of flourishing escapes this antinomy. It concurs with MacIntyre that a subjective or excessively lax pluralism inhibits engagement between conflicting forms of life, leaving each position isolated and tolerating all. This is one consequence of Weber's decisionism, a consequence which carries forward in some branches of political science and existentialist philosophy (Aron, 1967: 96; Taylor, 1991: 17-20). Yet it disagrees with MacIntyre insofar as this *laissez-faire*, quietist pluralism is distinguishable from a pluralism premised on the recognition that there are different ways of achieving diverse goods which do not exclude the possibility of rational evaluation or prevent engagement with alternative forms of life. As we described it, this latter pluralism is underpinned by a teleological metaphysics positing the existence of higher goods to which lesser goods are subordinated, but denying that these higher goods are bound in turn to an predominant good, whether it be political achievement or spiritual perfection. In this weaker, non-Thomist moral realism the relation between the higher goods of family, work, political engagement, and spirituality is *horizontal* rather than *vertical* and the necessary attempt to integrate discrete roles and goods proves a challenging and unending task.

This accords well with the reasonable insight that the general "common good" admits of a differentiation between ultimate common goods. Differentiation does not equate with diremption or compartmentalization, since ultimate goods cannot but impact on each other, but instead gives expression to the unique and irreducible worth of distinct arenas and modes of life. To appreciate that ultimate goods are pursued by different people in different forms is therefore to acknowledge the desirability of diversity (Nussbaum, 1990: 234-235; O'Neill, 1998: 22). The advantage of our modest moral realism, however, is that diversity is preserved without reverting to subjectivism. Subjectivist pluralism makes the three-fold claim that there is a plurality of non-interchangeable goods, that there is a plurality of beliefs

⁸ Hence, for instance, Sullivan's (1983: 60-66, 95-96) critique of the turn from freedom understood as civil liberty to freedom understood as self-realization, flourishing, or perfection. See O'Neill (1998: 17-21) for a discussion of related anti-perfectionist theories.

about the good or goods, *and* that the criterion for deciding between conflicting goods is arational individual preference. A non-subordinating metaphysics endorses the first two claims whilst denying the third. Thus, a flourishing polity achieves an optimum of non-interchangeable goods and these goods are pursued by actors possessing discrete talents and dispositions who argue about the best understanding of each practice pursued. But because, as was shown (Ch 10.I.i), these actors find themselves within intersubjective networks with standards that stand over them, individual preference cannot be the sole or even prime criterion in times of crisis.

It is evidently the case, then, that the perfectionism defended here is compatible with the fact of pluralism and does not threaten tyranny, indeed quite the reverse. There are certainly limits to what a society can allow, but these limits are set by reference to an ideal of personal and intersubjective independence that openly acknowledges the condition of human vulnerability. What independence and vulnerability signify can only be ascertained through substantive analysis of real world contexts and problems, wherein the meaning of independence and vulnerability changes through time. This analysis remains to be done, but clearly it is both intelligible and permissible.

11.III.) The Site of Political Endeavour

In Chapter One we saw that for Weber the “iron cage” overlays all political and economic activity. Actors must accept the inevitability of instrumental, hierarchically configured organizations and yet harness them as best they can. Hence the antinomy between charismatic leaders and machines, the machine providing the organizational resources needed to carry out projects, the exceptional leader bound to this apparatus and yet directing it according to the evaluative dictates of an inner cause. Here democracy means the dominance of an active few over passive masses, not the fantasy of citizen rule.

Our three thinkers are repelled and fascinated by this vision. Spurning Weber’s elitism, Habermas believes the modern constitutional state is not merely a means of violence but rests on an idea of law presuming the co-originality of individual rights and popular sovereignty (Ch 3.IV, 4.I.i). Thus, democracy does not degrade into plebiscitary rule; instead, citizens find an outlet for their aspirations in the interplay between weak and strong publics. However, Habermas’ division between opinion-forming and decision-making competencies engenders a paradoxical politics in which popular sovereignty is extolled and yet where citizens’ active capacities are distanced from government, limited to discourse in the “subjectless,” “anonymous” public spheres of civil society (Ch 4.III.i). More gravely still, his “ontological spatialization” of communicative lifeworlds and blindly instrumental sub-systems reduces political administration to “norm-free sociality” and denies labour’s role in identity formation.

Arendt’s “Dual-State” is a far more robust reply to Weber. Refusing to separate opinion-forming and decision-making competencies, she sees the state as the focus and site of political aspiration (Ch 6.IV., 7.I.ii). A transformation of the state is demanded so as to enable government to operate *by* and *for* citizens, not *over* and *against* them, this transformation necessitating an institutional separation, mediation, and continuity lacking in civil society. Yet this otherwise radical ideal of citizenship suffers dramatic truncation. Analogous to the Habermasian division between communicative and instrumental action, Arendt’s opposition between performative action (*praxis*) and purposive work (*poiesis*) gives rise to an untenable bifurcation of the political and the “Social” (Ch 7.II.i, 7.III.i). The result, again, is that huge swathes of human activity fall under the sign of “necessity,” administration and the economic being consigned to technocratic elites in manner confirming Weber’s politically realist diagnosis of social relations.

MacIntyre's response to the "iron cage" is subtly different. His idea of "transformative practice" disrupts the dichotomies between *Zweckrationalität* and *Wertrationalität*, instrumental and communicative action, *poiesis* and *praxis*, that provide the conceptual spur to Habermas and Arendt's bifurcations (Ch 9.III., 10.I.ii). The significance of this non-dualist perspective is that administration and the economic are no longer theoretically abandoned to "necessity" or "norm-free sociality," thus allowing for a retrieval of key human activities. Unfortunately, MacIntyre relinquishes these gains. His stark opposition between the politics of local community and that of the modern state and market economy neglects "structural interpenetration" and generates a dualist framework equivalent to Habermas and Arendt's (Ch 10.III.i). The result is not only nostalgic adherence to a model of citizenship already outmoded in pre-modernity, but a reinforcement of the belief that large areas of modern life are necessarily fallen, inhuman.

All three thinkers are therefore guilty of bifurcating social reality in unacceptable and simplistic ways. Our arguments against this shared tendency have varied in each case, but they point to the impossibility of coherently upholding dualist spatializations, the fact that they lead to large areas of life being arbitrarily excluded from critical reflection, and, finally, the damaging effect they have on our understanding of identity formation and the self. On first glance, however, these spatializations might appear appropriate. Our thinkers wish to side step the "iron cage" and believe a division of reality into free and fallen realms aids in this. By means of dualist myths, the forces of civility and barbarity can be identified and the former defended, the agents of lifeworld, the political, or local community now the paladins of a better future, in contrast to those of system, the Social, or the capitalist state (Barnes, 1995: 211). The fundamental difficulty with this tactic, however, is not just its patent theoretical and empirical implausibility but the ironic truth that in designating certain realms as irrevocably fallen it reinforces, rather than contests, Weber's vision. Condemning elitism, political realism, or the compartmentalization of value spheres, Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre nonetheless exacerbate these problematics by curtailing citizens' decision-making competencies, advocating an extreme social-economic realism, or compartmentalizing community and state.

If Weber is to be contested and if large arenas of life are not to be excluded from critical reflection, then a monist theory refusing to divide reality according to opposed rationalities or ontological conditions is required. As suggested throughout, monism means here an insistence on the spatial interwovenness of human activities, *not* a reduction of reality to one

causal chain or value.⁹ Spatial monism is therefore eminently compatible with the value or axiological pluralism defended in the previous section. Understood in this precise sense, monism surpasses dualist theorizations in a number of ways. If, as Weber believed, widespread political engagement is impossible under modern institutional forms and the hope of humanising bureaucratic organizations forlorn, then they must at least be *consistently* impossible and forlorn. The difficulty with the dualist frameworks criticized here is that they accept Weber's bleak diagnosis as regards system, the Social, and the capitalist state and yet maintain that there is still room for hope. But were this diagnosis largely true, the only honest course would be to admit that there exists no ground for hope, no chance for real improvement. When administrations, markets, and states, the incontrovertibly dominant institutions of modern society, are impervious to internal change, it is simply delusional to believe the public sphere, "elementary republics," or local community could resist the tide of passification.

It is by narrating a Manichaeian tale of fallen and free realms that dualist theories reconcile the irreconcilable, transmute despair into hope, whereas the virtue of monist theories, including Weber's, is their refusal to countenance these reconciliations. This suggests a further strength of monist theorization, the fact that it precludes extolling politically peripheral over politically pre-eminent spheres of life. With Habermas and MacIntyre dualism leads to a privileging of civil society. This turn is of course not confined to these two alone, but a recurrent feature of recent political thought. A sphere of voluntary association lying between the economy and state, civil society promises a recovery of actors' communicative and participatory capabilities in a manner which limits sectional power and interests, publicly thematizes hidden injustices, and prevents ordinary subjects from becoming the quiescent clients of administrations and corporations.¹⁰ No doubt these expectations are not entirely without ground, for civil society does encompass pivotal forms of intersubjective life. We have seen, however, that there are also very good reasons for not privileging this realm (Ch 7.I.ii; 10.III.i). It is said to provide a bulwark against sectional interests and yet its associations are permeated by these, are as much, if not more, the preserve of classes and corporations motivated by status maintenance and profit as of groups

⁹ In this sense Adorno and Foucault are exemplary monists, as are Hegel, Marx, and those, Honneth (1999) for example, who refuse to surrender labour to norm-free sociality. See Barnes (1995: 215)

¹⁰ See Havel (1986; 1988), Konrad (1987), Keane (1988b), Melucci (1988; 1989), Cohen & Arato (1992), Putnam (1992), Hirst (1993a; 1993b), Gellner (1994), and Rodgers & Cohen (1995). For important discussions of this turn, see Mansbridge (1983: 70-79), Walzer (1992: 89-107), Resnick (1997: 97-108), Ehrenberg (1999: 173-250), Scheuerman (1999: 177), and Carter (2000: 228-249).

motivated by justice or the common good (Ch 4.III.i).¹¹ The problematic fact that civil society's associations have no intrinsic bond with equality or social justice is intensified, as Arendt saw, by their fluid, shifting institutional structures. The separation of powers, mediation of opinions, and appropriate distance, one neither anonymous nor crushingly fraternal, needed to secure fair participation and moderation are absent, meaning in turn an increased likelihood that only privileged or parochial interests will find voice. What appears a voluntary realm of cooperation and mutual aid is in truth riven with involuntary power inequalities generated by the wider economic and political structures of society.

There is nothing in civil society, then, that makes it *especially* suited to increasing political participation, thematizing injustice, or countering the passification of citizens, whereas the modern state's foundational commitment to citizen equality offers at least a limited institutional guarantee that these concerns will not be silenced, will recur time and again in moments of contestation. Some civil society theorists have conceded this. To correct the deficiencies of intermediate associations, these moderates argue for the continued existence of strong interventionist states so as to ensure social justice and limit sectional power by holding economic agents in check (Held, 1987: 283-289; Young, 1999: 157-160). Their arguments correctly point to the overarching role of the economy and state in determining the shape of citizens' lives. In doing so, however, they also show that the problems for which civil society was initially thought a solution are primarily problems originating within and emanating from the economy and state. But if they originate in these spheres, then solutions cannot be found in intermediate associations, not least because these associations are rendered radically ambivalent by these selfsame problems, but must instead be sought in the economy and state themselves (Resnick, 1997: 108; Ehrenberg, 1999: 246-248).

It is not therefore unreasonable to think the privileging of civil society a sign of timidity, of an age trusting only in indirect, largely foredoomed responses to social crisis. Here it is worth recalling Arendt's central complaint against Weber, that his Platonic separation of *archein*, "to begin" or "to rule," and *prattein*, "to finish" or "to follow through," leads inevitably to a politics of elite domination (Ch 7.I.ii). Although civil society theorists wish to advance citizens' active capacities, in understanding the state as necessarily premised on a rule of the few over the many they inadvertently legitimate this venerable separation and thus enfeeble calls for empowerment. Moderates who recognize the enduring

¹¹ Thus, while civil society may be a vehicle of the Left, it is just as much, as Habermas (*TCA*, I: 394) concedes, a vehicle of the Right, of thinkers such as Scruton (1988: 449-462) who defend a non-egalitarian order, property, and free-market values.

significance of the state face a similar dilemma, for while they desire increased participation in government, the dualist categories of their thought conspire to prevent this. The reason why they initially commended civil society was that it appeared a communicative, non-manipulative counterbalance to the instrumental, depersonalizing logic of state and market institutions. The difficulty, however, is that when the state and economy are defined as essentially instrumental and dominative, there can be no democratization.¹²

Because the economy and state are the prime institutions of modern life they ought to constitute the principal focus of emancipatory reflection, both in terms of the internal functioning of these institutions *and* in terms of the chance for increased citizen or worker participation. But if we are not to conclude in nullifying despair Weber's specific version of monism has to be jettisoned. Weber's monism is superior to dualist theories in spurning easy reconciliations and concentrating attention on politically pre-eminent realms. However, his characterization of large-scale organization as stiflingly hierarchical, determined by rigid regulations, and subdivided according to minutely specialized tasks impels the assumption that actors are necessarily rendered atomized and mute, thereby tempting theorists towards dualist myths. Yet this characterization is wrong, something our three thinkers acknowledge, albeit infrequently. Consigning administration and labour to system, Habermas (*TCA*, II: 310) nonetheless sees the error of Weber's "classical model of bureaucracy," the truth that if communicative understanding "were banished from the interior of organizations, formally regulated social relations could not be sustained." Likewise, in stressing flux, impermanence, and unpredictability, Arendt's (*OT*: 431-435; *EJ*: 152) analysis of totalitarianism undermines the equation of organization with minute regulation, inflexible orders, and passivity, thus indirectly suggesting that if a pathological active bureaucracy is possible so too are non-pathological, even emancipated, sorts. And in his critique of technocratic expertise and the impossible dream of regulating society according to law-like generalizations, MacIntyre (*AV*: 106) is forced to mitigate his otherwise extreme rejection of modern institutional forms and admit that actually existing large-scale organizations inevitably allow for "individual initiative, a flexible response to changes in knowledge, [and] the multiplication of centres of problem-solving and decision-making."

These observations are significant for showing Weber's metaphors of the "iron cage" and "mechanized petrification" to be misleading caricatures. As caricatures, their effect is to rule out large-scale organization as an authentic site for deliberation, shared ideals, and

¹² Young (1999: 143-145) takes a moderate stance, for instance, but in endorsing Habermas' claim that the state, economy, and civil society presume "three distinct ways of coordinating action," she effectively undercuts the grounds for participatory governmental structures.

collective aspiration, to falsely suggest that human beings can become cogs. Once they are rejected, however, the state and economy become amenable to constructive critique. False turns aside, Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre have much to contribute to this rearticulation of contemporary possibilities. It is impossible here to adequately explore these possibilities, but, clearly, to gain initial credence they must be underpinned by a theory of modernity that eschews Weber's totalizing pessimism. This Habermas provides in arguing that the core meaning of modernity is not instrumental dominance over nature and humanity or an inner turn towards an isolated self, but an ideal of socialization in which individuals attain maturity in concert with others. Coupled with his view that individual rights and popular sovereignty are embedded within modern political consciousness as constitutive and regulative norms, this ideal yields a standard, albeit indeterminate and open to plural specification, by which to judge existing institutions. Arendtian "substantive citizenship," in turn, lends force to this standard by insisting that maturity demands actual participation within government and those bodies where the power to change states of affairs is at stake. To retreat from this view is to trivialize political freedom. The challenge in a post-Weberian era is therefore to arrive at institutional structures that will combine citizens' opinion-forming and decision-making competencies in an enduring manner.

The potentialities here are many, among them such experiments as the delegation of powers, federalization, and citizen juries. None presumes a naive sort of direct democracy where citizens are understood in Rousseauian terms as homogenous or undifferentiated. Instead they point to a diffusion of decision-making competencies across a plurality of institutions that together form the state, the binding assumption being that action within these institutions is the prerogative of all. Nevertheless, without a similar diffusion of decision-making competencies within the economy and administrations, these experiments are likely to come to nothing. Hence the importance of MacIntyre's critique of "norm-free sociality" and our repeated claim against Habermas and Arendt that there exists no realm of human activity devoid of ethical life, no arena immune to conscious intervention (Ch 4.III.i, 7.III.i, 10.I.ii). The truth that every institutional complex is upheld by ethical *teloi*, that practices and institutions are inseparable, means that modernity's pathologies are not due to systemic "colonization," "de-linguistification," or ontological conditions run amok, the misleading supposition of dualist accounts of modernity, but instead to a rudimentary misunderstanding and even perversion of the proper ends and modes of collective organizational endeavour. Acknowledging the embeddedness of ethical ideals within administration and the economy, it therefore becomes possible to urge a revision of these ideals. Thus, in the realm of production the idea of "transformative practice" entails an understanding of work not merely

as a means to consumption, the current motivating ideal, but as an intimate part of the workers' life and identity. The goal, consequently, is a mode of production wherein the pursuit of quantitative external goods is checked by and bound to the pursuit of qualitative internal goods determined by reference to the conditions of human flourishing. Similarly, in the realm of administration the idea of "purposeful performance" shows that genuine expertise is a "modest" expertise different in degree rather than kind to the *phronetic* wisdom of ordinary subjects. *Techne* and *praxis* now recognized as intertwined, the fantasy of neutral administration thereby gives way to a view of organization where it is people bound by shared practices and justificatory understandings who rule, not abstract regulations. A path is therefore cleared for subjecting these practices and understandings to critique in the name of those they supposedly serve.

The task now is to think through the implications of the above for existing institutions. This is an assuredly utopian undertaking, but it remains the *only* course if we are to consistently hold to independence and flourishing as serious political ideals. It may transpire that the vast intricacy of modern societies will frustrate attempts at restructuring, that the best achievable is a policy of tinkering in line with piecemeal and occasional micro-narratives. Whether this is true or not is an empirical question unanswerable by theory alone. It is salutary to recognize, however, that the current inclination towards micro-narratives relies on the grandest of claims, that ours really is an age of mechanized petrification and that we are cogs.

11.IV.) Politics and Strategy

This study also sought to analyse the role risk, strategy, and coercion play in politics. For Weber struggle is a fundamental condition of humankind, one magnified in the modern West by the destruction of the unifying ethical core once bestowed by Christianity. Struggle assumes many forms, but in politics it finds its purest expression in an unrelenting contest of will between leaders, factions, and nation-states.

Here and elsewhere we argued this represents an excessively one-sided vision of politics' potentialities. As Habermas and MacIntyre see it, Weber omits the intersubjective constitution of political life, that action necessarily occurs within cooperative networks of understanding and practice irreducible to coercive individual wills. Our defence of a non-decisionist ethic presumes the truth of this critique. In responding to Weber, however, Habermas and MacIntyre conclude with an equally one-sided account of politics. Both neglect the recurrent problem of "argumentative stalemate" and downplay those "temporally urgent" moments when, in judging as to justice of abortion or the acceptability of racism for instance, actors vehemently disagree but must nonetheless act (Ch 4.III.ii, 10.III.ii). Thus, politics cannot be equated with communicative understanding or dialectical conversation but must also be seen as a sphere encompassing principled hostility and conflict. A shared failure to recognize this truth is compounded by other elements of their thought. Habermas' developmental-logical narrative of modernity, moral consciousness, and the modern constitutional state suppresses the historically contingent, struggle bound origins of these particularities, the decisive role of developmental dynamics. His regulative "ideal speech situation," furthermore, enjoins consensus as the end point of deliberation and is thus conceptually premised on an overcoming of difference and conflict. Similarly, MacIntyre's denial of ethical dilemmas, supposition of an overarching *summum bonum*, and Thomist vision of a perfectly integrated community together suggest the possibility of achieving complete comprehension and harmony. In both cases what is sought is an unattainable moment of "perfect legitimacy" where politics, understood as an incessant negotiation and re-negotiation of crises, ceases to exist.

Arendt's strength, we saw, is to give the reality of contingency, frailty and uncertainty its due (Ch 5, 6.III., 7.I.i). The condition of natality, that actors are free to begin the new, invalidates developmental-logical readings of history and visions of perfect integration, since these readings and visions cannot account for the unexpected, for the rise of totalitarianism

or the advent of revolutions.¹³ Because action is both boundless and irreversible, the political realm is inherently frail. What prevents freedom from succumbing to tyranny is not philosophy, universal-historical logics, or the faculty of *synderesis* but a contingent act of promising, of trusting in one's fellow citizens, premised on the equally contingent recognition that the basis of freedom is not coercive sovereignty, as Weber assumed, but a plurality which requires moderation and care to endure. In Arendt, then, the reality of political risk is brought to the fore. The problem, however, is that she fails to fully explore this risk (Ch 7.III.ii). Led astray by an inadequate phenomenology, she identifies the political and the faculty of reflective judgement with "being-with" or friendship, with the result that the intertwinement of power with coercion and the discriminating nature of judgement fall from view. This also leads her to suppose that promising can occur without "remainder" or contested exclusions, even though the fact that each promise is a specific promise, one among a vast number, renders the avoidance of exclusion and of the frequent need to coerce at times impossible. Thus, although admirably attuned to contingency, Arendt attenuates the import of risk and, with Habermas and MacIntyre, yearns for a moment of "perfect legitimacy" where conflict and hostility have disappeared.

The spur to these one-sided rejoinders to Weber's reductive account of the political is once again a division of reality into free and fallen realms. The rationale underlying the depoliticization of administration, the economy, and the state is that system, the Social, and the state are intrinsically dominative, in contrast to the communicative, non-manipulative foundations of lifeworld, the public realm, or local community. Our arguments against "ontological spatialization" have conclusively discredited this line of reasoning. Just as system is a cooperative realm underpinned by normative expectations, so too is lifeworld a realm of conflict. The task, then, is to think through the interwovenness of the strategic and communicative without succumbing to *fundamentalism*, defined in the sense of ascribing a singular foundational logic to the "authentically" political. And this means breaking beyond the confines of Weber's thought and that of his critics. Despite his non-dualist theory of political space, Weber's inordinate emphasis on dominative struggle falsifies politics as both reality and ideal, leaving actors with no non-coercive means by which to mediate disagreements and conflict.¹⁴ Oppositely, our three critics' inordinate emphasis on mutual understanding, "being-with," and conversational dialogue leaves actors bereft of the means

¹³ We saw, as well, that although MacIntyre stresses unpredictability, his "degenerative" historical logic mirrors Habermas' developmental logic and thus diminishes the role of *fortuna* (Ch 10.II.i).

¹⁴ As Aron (1971:84) put it, "a pessimistic distortion, inspired to show that power-politics are inevitable and indispensable, is no less to be feared than an idealistic distortion."

to act in moments of radical dissension. In both cases a disabling foreshortening of politics occurs, either a denial that it can be more than a battle of wills or a reluctance to accept as central its more troubling challenges.

Defenders of Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre will voice two objections to this mediating course. First, it is simply untrue that these thinkers conceal the reality of coercion or violence. The “ideal speech situation,” the relation of “being-with,” and the demands of conversational dialogue are responses to violence and domination that, as *regulative ideals*, provide aspirational standards by which to critique concrete interactions.¹⁵ It is by approaching these standards that interaction can be presumed sufficiently rational or non-dominative. Our critique has therefore confused counterfactuals with their empirical actualizations and has misinterpreted the goal of excising exclusionary mechanisms as far as is humanly possible. Second, and most problematically, this misinterpretation surrenders the promise of politics and thereby threatens a reversion to Weber’s political realism, his denial that the common good can be separated from sectional interest.

As to the first objection, we have shown that while it would be absurd to think Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre deny the reality of coercion, their failure to properly address the problems of “argumentative stalemate,” “temporal urgency,” and “remainder” means that the full ramifications of this reality are neglected. Furthermore, these problems are not simply of *empirical* actualization or application, of regulative standards being frustrated by chance circumstances. Rather, dissension, urgency, and exclusion are *inherent* aspects of political life. We saw that discursive interaction often leads to the entrenchment of disagreement and cannot in principle include all those affected, that founding moments are simultaneously acts of constitution and exclusion and, finally, that dialectical conversations as to the true or good have as their counterpart disputes as to the untrue or evil. Our critique, therefore, does not confuse counterfactuals with their empirical actualization but lays bare unthematized aspects of these counterfactuals themselves and, far from misinterpreting the goal of excising exclusionary mechanisms, actually shows the formidable complexity of this task.

It is the reality of unpredictability that renders this task complex and precarious. Because actors inhabit relational networks and inherit histories over which they have little control, the avoidance of conflict and strategy is more often than not a matter of brute luck. Broad agreement certainly underpins stable polities, but stability does not imply consensus

¹⁵ See Cooke’s (1999b: 177) defence of Habermas against Cornell (1995: 193) and Mansbridge (1996: 51) and Habermas’ (*MCCA*: 92; *JA*: 163; 1992c: 479) own arguments against concretist readings of the “ideal speech situation.” For a similar defence of Arendt, see Knauer (1980: 721-733).

on all issues. Nor is stability a possession guaranteed for all times and within all contexts. “Crisis” means a weakening of foundational accord in which solidity gives way to fluidity. Yet fluidity is at once both a threat and an opportunity. It increases the likelihood of social violence and unrest, the costs of which are frequently borne by the weakest groups, and yet promises the chance of changing political orders for the better (Mansbridge, 1996: 47). This, in short, is the meaning of “risk.” When “argumentative stalemate” accompanies instability, the only resort actors have is to try to effect a new political order by the least destructive means at hand.

This can take two forms. On the one hand, actors may opt to compromise. Here compromise is not simply interest-directed bargaining, as Habermas (*BFN*: 166, 177) and MacIntyre (*PP*: 245) suppose, but a principled response to situations of ineliminable moral-ethical divergence in which actors hold to the good or flourishing as ideals, but accept varying degrees of imperfection for the sake of the polity’s future. On the other hand, because of the elementary significance of particular ends or ideals, actors may reject compromise and opt for all out success. Depending on the circumstances, the determination to succeed can range from majority voting, through civil disobedience, to armed conflict, all of which involve elements of coercion and the taking of irreversible decisions.¹⁶ Whatever the case, because the polity would otherwise atrophy, action *must* be taken without the perfectly legitimating “unforced force” of consensus or underlying accord. Indeed, there are moments when to cease discussion and to act coercively is the proper course. We saw this in relation to the American Civil War and Black slavery and in relation to racism and phrenology, positions which undercut equality and prevent advancement in knowledge (Ch 7.III.ii, 10.III.ii). This moment of coercion, at least, performs a *constructive*, world-enhancing role in pushing political orders beyond impasses and correcting injustice. But acting without full agreement and in conditions of “remainder” entails a revaluation of political legitimacy. In short, the legitimacy of an order, a procedure, or a substantive outcome is always a “rough legitimacy” of more or less.¹⁷ It is patently false to think the recourse to strategy necessarily tragic, but it remains fraught with the danger that what is done in the name of justice and the good now may eventually turn out in hindsight to have been unjust and evil. When finitude of forethought and power is a condition of being

¹⁶ Truths ignored by Habermas’ (*BFN*: 179) claim that the majority vote represents only a temporary stop in the ongoing discussion about what should be done.

¹⁷ “Actual democracies can produce at best a “rough” or “good enough” legitimacy, based on citizens’ generalizable interests in creating conditions of *relatively* willing cooperation” (Mansbridge, 1996: 54, my italics). See also Alexy (1989: 293), Dahl (1989: 161), and Moon (1993: 96).

human, we cannot say what is incontrovertibly legitimate or best, only what is better or worse, and even this knowledge must be tempered with a strong fallibilism.

Because pointing to a real danger faced by mediating theories, the second objection is less easily dismissed. Without stipulating the scope and limits of strategy, mediating positions can easily revert to singular logics, to a glorification of violence as quintessentially political. What is needed, therefore, is a normative understanding of the strategic attitude. It is essential to recognise, however, that within the conceptual framework underpinning Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre's thought this understanding cannot be coherently developed. The effect of their opposition between communicative and instrumental reason, *praxis* and *poiesis*, practical reasoning and compromise, is to divorce ethics from strategy, to automatically condemn the strategic attitude as amoral. The chance that the strategic attitude might be justified on ethical grounds, that strategy is an appropriate and sometimes virtuous response to intractable difficulties, is consequently eliminated.

A first step in theorizing an ethical conception of strategy is to acknowledge that the recourse to strategy and coercion, while intrinsic to political life, is not always inevitable. There may be moments when widespread agreement is attainable, when genuine dialogue and sense of "being-with" occurs. To deny this is again to neglect unpredictability, thus diminishing politics' possibilities, and, more seriously, to weaken the injunction that actors seek cooperative resolutions before committing to coercion. A second step, however, is to acknowledge that when coercion and hostility are in truth inevitable this does *not* entail that everything is permitted. Despite avowing an "ethics of responsibility," Weber is particularly harmful in this regard. He (*RRW*: 334; *PV*: 123) enjoins actors to "help right to triumph by the use of force," warning that otherwise they may be responsible for greater evils, and yet believes that politics is fundamentally a contract with "diabolical powers," that ethical and political life follow incommensurable laws. But were politics truly a contract with diabolical powers there could be little possibility of helping the right or good to triumph, since the right and good would have no purchase on this realm. Instead, no action would be beyond the pale, no deed too heinous, in the quest for power. Scathingly critical of the *Machtpolitiker*, Weber's "ethics of responsibility" nonetheless concludes with a *Machtpolitik* of its own where the claims of justice are recognised and yet denied.

Whatever the strategic attitude may be it cannot be "diabolical," for then all talk of limits would be pointless. As a metaphor, Weber's contract is a distorting hyperbolism; as a literal injunction, a license to cruelty and unbridled destruction (Shklar, 1984: 192). A vigorously normative conception of strategy, in contrast, denies that ethics and politics abide by different laws and instead views ethics as an immanent response to the challenges of

politics. In contrast to *Machtpolitik*, which justifies strategy primarily in terms of attaining and retaining power, the justification of strategy in our mediating course is the maintenance and furtherance of the conditions of human flourishing. Moreover, in line with a respect for limits, strategy remains ethical if it avoids succumbing to a dehumanizing enmity where opponents are reduced to mere objects. The same moderation and care which informs relations of friendship must also govern strategic interactions if they are not to degrade into atrocity. Although voiced by thinkers, Nietzsche and Sorel among them, who otherwise exhibit a dangerous tendency to glorify violence as an end-in-itself, “the spirit of fighting without hatred and ‘without the spirit of revenge’” is a key political virtue.¹⁸ It is key because strategy is most often enjoined when goods common to friends and opponents alike are at stake. The assumption shared by Habermas, Arendt and MacIntyre that strategy is egoistic or directed towards sectional interests ignores the real hazard of conflict, that it is self-effacing contention over matters of principle or the common good and not private interest which pushes actors towards fanaticism. The threat of fanaticism, however, is lessened not by urging a liberal privatization of the good or communication in situations in which communication has concluded in deadlock, but by investing the strategic attitude itself with a sense of accountability.

This sense of accountability derives from the realization by actors that even as adversaries they are dependent on others for their continued existence. As a sense it cannot be demonstrated *a priori*, since it remains open to the consistent sceptic to choose unrestrained conflict, despite the terrible consequences of that choice.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the sceptic’s choice does not render accountability a subjective matter of inscrutable preference. Rather, the motivation to accountability issues from the observation that to surrender the intersubjective constitution of social life to a war of all against all is to court madness, an observation grounded in turn on experience of cruelty and an historical awareness of the horrors of political excess. It is the real harm done to social life by *hubris* and excess that impels men and women to demand justifications from actors. Thus, the ultimate criterion for strategic acts is not success, but success in a reflective, non-Pyrrhic sense, whether these deeds truly advance the ends and ideals sought, whether they endanger these ends and ideals by generating even greater enmity, and, whether, finally, they abide by the norms of interaction as far as possible, if not by their letter then at least in their spirit.

¹⁸ Arendt (CR: 167) quoting Sorel (1999 [1906]: Ch 5, III). See Moon (1995: 157) for a view of non-objectivating conflict that nonetheless rejects Nietzsche and Sorel’s “life philosophy.”

¹⁹ Indeed, Habermas’ (MCCA: 100) idea of socialization, Arendt’s (HC: 236-238) account of mutual promising, and MacIntyre’s (AV: 190-196) theory of practice are less proofs against value-scepticism than reflective descriptions of the grounds of human sociability.

In the moment of strategy communication and fellow feeling no longer suffice, but that only increases the need for judgement and careful discrimination. Because the setting of limits and attainment of worthy ends often comes about through contestation and stratagem, it is judgement and discrimination in difficult circumstances that sustains the promise of politics. What a mediating course stressing complexity loses in theoretical elegance it therefore gains in truth. We should not aim at false reconciliations or assimilate diverse phenomena under a singular logic. Instead, the necessary and creative tensions of political life must be affirmed.

11.V.) Closing Remarks

In his judgement of post-war Europe Raymond Aron (1971: 83) was assuredly correct that “Max Weber does not belong to a past which is over and done with.” No metaphor has captured the political imagination moreso than the “iron cage” and no prophecy has instilled such apprehension as that of “mechanized petrification.” Together they provided the impetus to critical political thought throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, as our exploration of Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt, and Alasdair MacIntyre has conclusively shown. Yet while Weber and the latter three are not of the past but entirely present in terms of how we now conceive politics’ challenges and potentialities, the aim of this study has been to discern those aspects of their work which ought to be carried forward into the future.

The answer, as our preceding discussions revealed, is far from simple. Rather than endorse one thinker exclusively, in thinking beyond Weber we travelled the complicated path of conjoining diverse strengths and rejecting manifest weaknesses, both specific and shared. From Habermas we took his ideal of socialization and account of legitimacy, whilst questioning his morality-ethics divide and abstract understanding of critique. From Arendt we took her notion of substantive citizenship and stress on contingency, yet carefully distancing ourselves from her ideas of “performative action” and “disinterested judgement.” And from MacIntyre we took his emphasis on the good and theory of practice, all the while wary of following him down the route of Thomist moral realism and rejecting his nostalgia for pre-modern social orders. The result is a perspective emphasising the intersubjective grounds of political life and alive to politics’ central role in facilitating human flourishing. Weber’s elitism, decisionism, and normatively foreclosed account of legitimacy stifled awareness of these realities and possibilities. In drawing attention to them, Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre therefore deserve unstinting praise. Yet this praise must be tempered with the realization that their thought also impedes an adequate theorization of politics. This we showed in exploring the shared tendency towards “ontological spatialization” and singular logics. Our conclusion that spatial dualisms are to be avoided if politics is not to be pre-emptively foreclosed and that the strategic, as both brute fact and ethical category, cannot and ought not to be overcome, is not just a correction of three individual theorists, however, but also an important admonition to wider contemporary thought.

The question now is where to take this admonition, its paths of further development. Here the possibilities are daunting in their scope. Our vision of a politics that nurtures the

conditions of individual flourishing and robustly facilitates those practices wherein flourishing is realized would seem to encompass the totality of social life, not simply the debating chamber but also the workplace, school, and home. The paths, then, are many and varied, ranging from an exploration of how best to instil ideals of excellence in the young whilst respecting diversity, to the development of a conception and practice of work which does not reduce to the accumulation of the means of consumption. To pursue them, however, we would certainly have to consider the implications of a politics of flourishing for social redistribution on national and international levels. Although this theme has not been directly examined, it underlies most of our assumptions and claims. Indeed, because the ethical referent of this study is human needs and capacities, not entitlement or private interest, a strongly redistributive order would appear to be called for. Of course, the challenge then is to determine which needs and capacities justify what sort of redistribution and how to relate need and capacity to the concepts of desert and personal responsibility.

Our arguments against “ontological spatialization” also suggest lines of future enquiry. The claim that the state ought to be the prime locus of political endeavour requires the study of recent institutional experiments to be sufficiently credible. Hence the necessity, as was said, to investigate what the delegation of powers, federalization, and citizen juries, among other possibilities, can contribute to an appropriately restructured state. An essential question here, moreover, is whether this restructured state must necessarily take the form of a *nation-state*, as Weber would insist. For various reasons Habermas, Arendt, and MacIntyre reject outright the idea of the nation-state, arguing instead either for post-national federal frameworks or a turn towards the local. Our arguments have defended the political primacy of the state but remain as yet uncommitted to a particular state form. However, when it is currently the nation-state that upholds the liberties and freedoms definitive of citizenship, there being no other significant political institution which citizens can call their “own,” then a rejection of this institutional form in favour of post-national frameworks or transnational bodies might be deemed ill-judged in just the same way as the turn to civil society is ill-judged.

There was another dimension to our concern with the state. We already pointed to the need for extended consideration of large-scale organizations in terms not only of citizen participation but also in terms of their internal functioning. The reason, we saw, is that a restructured state and economy cannot be achieved without a viable alternative to Weber’s understanding of modern organization. A vast literature already exists on this subject, much very critical of Weber, yet little of it perceives large-scale organization as a site for transformative endeavour or a practice with its own internal goods. The principal reason for

this omission is the widespread assumption that bureaucracy equates with tedium and dehumanization. Nevertheless, if our goal is to ascertain how the work men and women presently do can be rendered less tedious and dehumanizing, that assumption must be rejected, at least at the inception of enquiry. We have already gone some way towards developing this enquiry, but what it now requires is a sustained study of large-scale organization as a present and ineliminable reality.

A final path of future attention is, of course, the problem of strategy. We have shown that strategy cannot be overcome, that the recourse to strategy is unassimilable to egoism or the pursuit of sectional interest, and that the strategic attitude is not one in which everything is permitted but represents an ethical response to intractable circumstances. We have not, however, explored the full scope or challenges of strategy. To do so would mean investigating the manifold circumstances in which human beings conflict, up to and including the phenomenon of war. What is permitted actors in times of extreme crisis is not what is permitted them in moments of relative normality. The task, therefore, is to analyse normal and extreme cases so as to determine what actors can and cannot do.

The above paths are simply intimations of further thought and practice, not blueprints or prophecies. Whether the study of social justice, the state, large-scale organization, or political violence, each is a major venture doomed to futility without sustained reflection and scholarly commitment. Yet, in Weber's memorable words, "politics is a strong and slow boring of hard boards" that "takes both passion and perspective." The same is assuredly true of political thought.

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